HOW COLOR FUNCTIONS IN BLACK AND WHITE PAINTING

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by

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Recently Bruce Geller, executive producer of MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE, (popular television series) said, "There's nothing quite as arresting in color as black and white."[1] Numerous white on white, black and white, and black on black paintings have become well-known and accepted within the United States. Herein, this painter will make an examination of black and white as color.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to examine how color functions in black and white painting. The importance of black and white is examined in relationship to the other art elements of line, shape, texture, and especially, value.

A brief historical background of the symbolic significance of black and white as color will be a prelude to the study of the symbolic implications of three well-known contemporary painters. These artists are Kasimir Malevich, Franz Kline, and Ad Reinhardt. The three basic, different,

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[1]Dick Hobson, "Study in Black and White," TV Guide, XVI, No. 3 (January 20, 1968), 22-23.

and unique styles of these artists--with their techniques of black and white usage, will be analyzed in relation to color function. A synopsis of a selected painting from each artist will be made.

The results of these findings will be incorporated and executed in five black and white paintings. The style and subject matter of the researched artists will not be used. No one specific technique will be used. However, a combination of these artists' techniques with this painter's own experiments may be incorporated into the studio work. Symbolic significance will be discussed here also.

Such a study is meaningful because the consideration and possibilities of using black and white as color should be explored and applied in original painting.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

The following terms will be defined in relation to their general usage in this study.

Color. The American College Dictionary defined color as follows:

> The evaluation by the visual sense of that quality of light (reflected or transmitted by a substance) which is basically determined by its spectral composition: that

> quality of a visual sensation distinct from form. Any color may be expressed in terms of three factors: hue, chroma (purity or saturation), and brightness (or value).[1]

Reference will also be made to the characteristics of color in terms of lightness and darkness and the amount or quantity of light reflected by the colors of black and white.

Function. Webster said function was, "the special activity; duty, operation of anything; any quality, trait, or fact so related to another that it is dependent upon and varies with it."[2] As an example, the function of space could be related to the function of color and value in a particular painting.

Black. The term black was defined by Webster as follows:

> The darkest color, ideally that represented by total absence of light or resulting from total absorption of all light rays; in practice, the completest possible negation of white, as the color of soot or a crow; loosely, an extremely dark shade of gray. In technical terms: the neutral or achromatic color of zero brilliance; that one of the six psychologically primary colors necessary and sufficient for the description of all colors by introspective analysis, which is evoked

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[1]C. L. Barnhart (ed.), The American College Dictionary (New York: Random House, Inc., 1961), p. 238.

[2]Philip Babcock Gove (ed.), Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1967), p. 920.

> in the light--adapted eye in the absence of incident radiant energy; loosely, any of several colors of very low or nearly zero saturation and of low or very low brilliance.[1]

This painter will do his studio paintings with Liquitex acrylic paint from Permanent Pigments, Incorporated. Their black is called Mars Black.

White. The American College Dictionary said white is the following:

> A color without hue at one extreme end of the scale of grays, opposite to black. A white surface reflects light of all hues completely and diffusely. Most so-called whites are very light grays: fresh snow, for example, reflects about eighty percent of the incident light, but to be strictly white, snow would have to reflect 100 percent of the incident light. It is the ultimate limit of a series of tints of any color, as black is the ultimate limit of a series of shades of any color.[2]

Titanium White will be used in the studio paintings.

Value. Webster stated value as, "the relation of one part or detail in a picture to another with respect to lightness and darkness."[3] This painter will be concerned with the relationships established between shapes and areas by means of varying degrees of value differences with black and white.

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[1] Ibid., p. 224.

[2] Barnhart, op. cit., p. 1391.

[3] Cove, op. cit., p. 2530.

Line. The term line was defined as follows by Webster:

> (a) A mark made by a pencil, brush, graver's tool, etc., forming a part of the formal design of a picture, as distinguished from shading or coloring; as, the lines of an etching, drawing, engraving. (b) The general style of a composition with respect to the sequence or arrangement of its outlines, contours, and other elements.[1]

This study will refer to the use of scriptlike or fluent line (calligraphy), and length and width of a line. The line will be studied in contour also. This creating of shape by serving as a continuous edge of a shape, form, or mass can operate as a separation between shapes, values, textures, and black and white color.

Texture. Here one finds that Webster has defined texture as, "manner of structure; interrelation of parts, the characteristic structure or structural quality resulting from the artist's blending or integration of elements."[2] Various methods of overcoming the flatness of the picture plane, in painting, to create the effect of depth or space, will be used by this painter with black and white color.

Shape. The American College Dictionary defined shape as, "an orderly arrangement, proper form; to give definite form, shape, or character to."[3] In studying or

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[1] Ibid., p. 1314. [2] Ibid., p. 2366.

[3] Barnhart, op. cit., p. 1113.

developing particular paintings, this painter will be concerned with these various areas, of more or less measurable dimensions, in relation to the art elements and the function of black and white.

Symbolism. Webster defined the term as follows: "Artistic imitation or invention, not as an end in itself but as a method or revealing or suggesting immaterial, ideal, or otherwise intangible truth or states."[1]

The term here does not refer to the movement started in 1889 by Paul Gauguin and the 'Synthetist' painters. Rather, the discussion will involve a more broad, historical, review of the symbolic use of black and white.

With a general clarification of how the foregoing terms will be used in context, the following chapter will proceed with the historic and symbolic significance of black and white as color.

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[1]Gove, op. cit., p. 2316.

CHAPTER II

THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF BLACK AND WHITE AS COLOR

Nearly every race and civilization has had definite ideas about black and white as color in relation to their beliefs. Early man was little concerned with aesthetics. He used color to express the ideal and mysterious rather than merely to add charm to his surroundings. The decorated tombs of ancient Egypt, for example, bear this out.

Birren related that the American Indians symbolized black as night. Black was considered masculine and white feminine. To the Cherokee, black was for death and white for peace and happiness.[1]

The Greeks considered the sphere of the deity as white, a unity of all colors. Aristotle believed that pure air and water are by nature white.[2]

The phallic emblem of black was held by the destroyer and reproducer, Siva, the fourth head of the

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[1]Faber Birren, Color - A Survey in Words and Pictures (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, Inc., 1963), p. 15.

[2]W. D. Ross (ed.), The Works of Aristotle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 17.

Hindus, Brahma. The sacred colors to Confucius were black, white, and yellow. He wore white during fasts symbolizing the highest spiritual attainment.[1]

Mohammed lived in the sixth century, A.D., and Birren stated the following about him:

> Historical sources say he dressed chiefly in white. He is described as entering Mecca wearing a black turban and holding a black standard which was at first adorned with the Roman Eagle. But the flag of later caliphs was black and bore the white legend, "Mohammed is the Apostle of God."
>
> Mohammed speaks of the last day: "On the day of resurrection thou shalt see the faces of those who have uttered lies concerning God, become black."[2]

The colors of black and white have been very important in Christianity. Ferguson said that in Christian symbolism black is a symbol of death and of the underworld. Black is the color of the Prince of Darkness. During the Middle Ages, it was associated with witchcraft, the "black art'. This color can also suggest mourning and sickness. It is the liturgical color for Good Friday, the day of Christ's Crucifixion.

White is symbolic of innocence of soul, of purity, and of holiness of life. In much of the history of Christianity, the clergy wore white. This color has

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[1]Birren, op. cit., p. 21. [2]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

remained in liturgical use for such seasons as Easter, Christmas, and the Ascension.

Black and white together, however, symbolize purity of life and humility. In this sense, certain religious orders, such as the Augustinians, used black and white together.[1]

Several excellent references to white as the color of purity are found in the Bible. For example, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7). In describing the angel of the Lord who rolled back the stone from the door of Christ's sepulchre, St. Matthew wrote, "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Matthew 28:3).

Then Jeremiah said, "I am black" (Jeremiah 8:21). The symbolic implication here is of Jeremiah's sense of failure, of himself, and his people.

Williams reported that in China, black denotes guilt and vice. A contumelious expression for depravity is to say that a man has a black heart. Here, also, white is the indication of moral purity.[2]

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[1]George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 90-92.

[2]C.A.S. Williams, Outlines of Chinese Symbolism (Peiping, China: Customs College Press, 1931), p. 70.

Face appearance is symbolized, in Tibet, by a white complexion portraying a mild nature while a black face portrays a fierce nature.[1] However, on the Chinese stage, a black face symbolizes a rough but honest man. A white face indicates a treacherous, cunning, but dignified person. A mean personality or low comedian is given a white nose.[2]

Today a literal reference to skin color may be symbolic. Extreme blackness would represent the perfect racial type among the Negroes or whiteness for the peoples of the Caucasian Race.

Preservation from evil also involved black and white color. Birren commented as follows:

> The Hindu mother, in India, daubed black on the nose and forehead or white cloth on her own dress. In Egypt white stones averted the evil eye when worn. Jet, a black substance, nullified spells and drove away snakes and quelled the thunderstorm.[3]

Again it is necessary to refer to the most noted and comprehensive authority on black and white symbolism. He made some very interesting, but brief, observations concerning color in relation to man's security or impending danger, culture, marriage with fertility, the Last Rites, and the ancient theories of disease.

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[1]Birren, op. cit., p. 15.

[2]Willians, loc. cit.

[3]Birren, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

In Central India, a twin saved the crops from rain or hail damage by standing in the direction of the wind with his right buttock painted black. Sacrifice of black animals drew water from the sky. The sun was brought forth by white beasts.

The black insect was portentous while the black cat and insect were omens of good fortune--this in the land of Spain. Here, the all-black cat had divine power to foretell weather.

It is said, even today, that Yorkshire fishermen dread white, while their Northumberland neighbors, fifty miles away, fear black.

In past times culture caused Creek Indian boys to be smeared with white clay at circumcision. In ancient Rome ladies wore white as an emblem of purity.

The native wife, in Central Africa, carried a black hen on her back if she desired a baby. Japanese and French women wore white girdles, as protection during pregnancy.

Borneo, China, and Japan accept white as the color of mourning and death. Most Western peoples use black with mourning also. Certain primitives, at the death of a relative, dye their teeth black. Recently, this painter, had an opportunity to see an exhibition of primitive art at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was amazed

at the use of black in the faces and masks. Truly, the color did give the very appearance and feeling of death.

In England the widows' garments are white, faced with black, while the servants, of masters, wear total black.[1]

It is difficult to understand the crucial part that color symbolism has played in human thinking in all societies--past and present. Such are the ancient theories of disease mentioned by Birren.

Ancient Greeks thought that a raven's eggs would restore blackness to the hair. The Greek would keep his mouth filled with oil while the egg was rubbed into his hair in order to keep his teeth from turning black. In Ireland, England and parts of Vermont black threads from the wool of black sheep cured earache. Black snails were rubbed on warts. In France rheumatism was relieved by black animal skins being applied to the body. Black fowl, if buried where caught, cured epilepsy. In England and South Africa the blood of a black cat cured pneumonia. White hare milk cured fever in Brittany. Ancient venoms, one white, caused disease.[2]

This painter has observed that modern scientific experimentation in milking certain species of poisonous

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[1] Ibid., pp. 42-53. [2] Ibid., pp. 52-53.

snakes has produced a white venom. Certainly, to the ancients, the bite from such a serpent would have been correlated with sickness and disease.

Legum stated the following from a recent news analysis:

> A study of color symbolism in the Western tradition has led scientists to list the following as most commonly associated with black: Woe, gloom, darkness, dread, death, terror, horror, wickedness, curse, mourning, mortification, error, annihilation, strength, deep quiet, defilement and despair.
>
> In contrast, white is associated with joy, light, innocence, triumph, divine power, purity, happiness, gaiety, peace, chastity, modesty, truth, delicacy and femininity. (The linking of white with femininity applies equally to Oriental societies.)[1]

The personal choice of a color preference is revealing. Birren's observations and study of psychology and psychiatry helped him to relate color to particular types of individuals.

He observed that few people picked white or black as favorites. There is little emotion in white or black. Choice of white denotes naiveté and innocence. It is a recall to youth and purity. Sophisticates often look on it as childish. Fondness for white probably reveals a trait of simplicity, or a desire for a simple life. With white

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[1]Colin Legum, "Man's Color: The Eternal Divider," The Des Moines Sunday Register, April 14, 1968, p. 12-G.

there is a willingness to live, but without excessive gravity. It indicates the unmolded human, the person frankly eager and honest to let the outside world control matters of destiny.

The preference for black, though rare, could indicate a morbid and despairing individual. Among the mentally ill it often does show such depressing moods. Yet among normal people, black may be anything but lugubrious. It is regal without being pompous and dignified without being officious. It is mighty, dignified and stark. Black does not "show off": it impresses with real substance and weight. Sophistication best describes the black type. Its passive quality is exciting. Those who choose black probably lead a different life in public than in private. A black-dressed woman may be striving to symbolize her mystery, real or implied.[1]

Different artists of the past have had symbolic impressions of black and white. Gerard deLairesse said, "White is the color of childhood."[2] Then Leonardo da Vinci observed, "Black is most beautiful in the shades; white in the strongest light."[3]

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[1]Birren, op. cit., p. 201.

[2]Faber Birren, History of Color in Painting (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1965), p. 80.

[3]Leonardo da Vinci, A Treatise on Painting, trans. John Francis Rigaud (London: George Bell & Sons, 1877), p. 142.

Kandinsky referred to black and white as follows:

> White is a symbol of a world from which all colors or material attributes have disappeared. . . . White, therefore, acts upon our psyche as a great, absolute silence. It is not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities. White has the appeal of the nothingness that is before birth.
>
> Black is something burnt out, like the ashes of a funeral pyre, something motionless like a corpse. The silence of black is the silence of death.[1]

Kandinsky had an interesting analogy of black and white color to music. He compared white to the pauses in music that temporarily break the melody. Black was represented by one of those profound and final pauses which ends the melody. Any continuation of a melody would be like the dawn of another world.

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[1]Birren, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

[2]Ibid., p. 94.

CHAPTER III

THE USE OF BLACK AND WHITE BY MALEVICH, KLINE, AND REINHARDT

Symbolic implications of black and white as color were a prelude to the following study of the application of these colors by Malevich, Kline, and Reinhardt.

This painter is primarily concerned with Malevich's use of white, Kline's use of black and white, and Reinhardt's use of black. These artists will be studied in the above order.

The Russian, Kasimir Malevich, (Figure 1), was born at Kiev in 1878. His father was Polish, his mother Russian. Malevich had a simple background and received little education as a boy. However, through his extraordinary perseverence and remarkable intuitive intelligence he gained a wide background of knowledge. He was an avid reader. He worked with great speed and concentration ruthlessly pursuing an idea to its logical conclusion. This man was a brilliant speaker and a man of great charm and humor. He was vociferous in the cause of art in public discussions and in his writings. However, he was reserved about himself and his personal feelings.

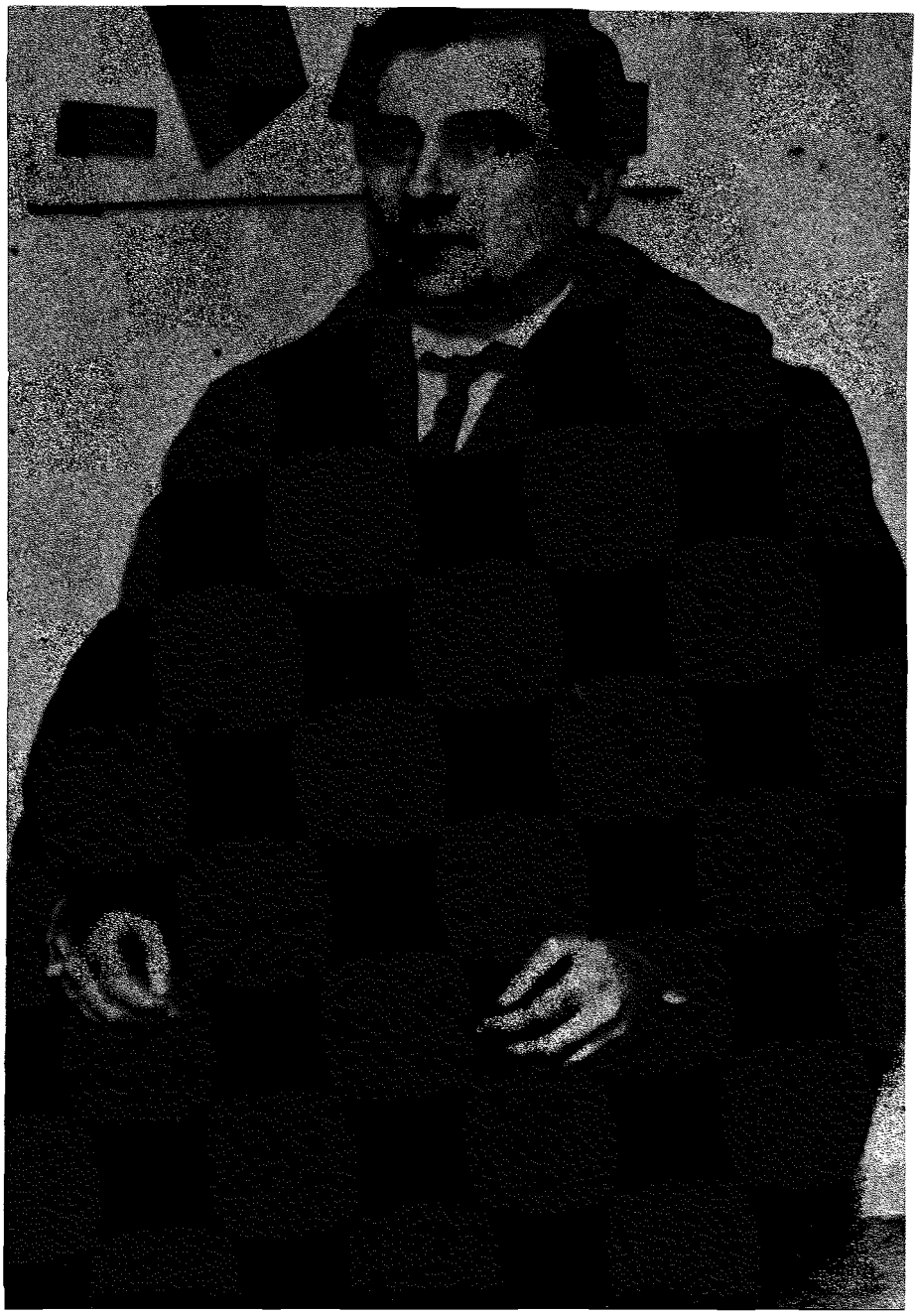

Figure 1. Kasimir Malevich.

Malevich entered the Kiev School of Art when he was nineteen. In 1900 he left and began working on his own.[1]

The Post-Impressionists and the Fauves were the first to influence Malevich. In 1911 he became the leader of the Russian Cubist movement.[2]

After a study of Kandinsky's theories this Cubist artist made a transition from abstract to nonobjective geometrical painting. This single decisive step was taken by producing a painting of a black square placed on a white background.[3] This painting marked the beginning of absolute painting. Malevich called it, "the experience of pure non-objectivity."[4]

John Canady quoted the following about Malevich's development:

> This painting was a demonstration of his theory that art must leave behind all dependence on motif. The square represented nothing at all, was an abstraction

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[1]Camilla Gray, The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1962), p. 128.

[2]Carlton Lake (ed.), Dictionary of Modern Painting (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 165-166.

[3]John Canaday, Mainstreams of Modern Art (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Company, 1961), p. 489.

[4]Werner Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1965), p. 194.

> of no concrete object. It was simply a geometrical area of black against a geometrical area of white "expressing" nothing. Suprematism was the name Malevich gave his new theory, which limited the painter's vocabulary to the rectangle, the circle, the triangle, and the cross. The third dimension was ruled out--instead of cubes, rectangles; instead of cones, triangles; instead of spheres, circles. It was permissible to combine these forms in a single painting, but since the aim of suprematism was to create the ultimate work of art, the black square on a white ground was the supreme suprematist composition.[1]

However, in 1918, Malevich conceived his white on white painting and this became the ultimate work of art.

Malevich visited the Bauhaus in 1926. His book, The Non-Objective World (1915), was published in German and later translated into English. His essay on Suprematism has been reproduced and is helpful for further study.[2]

To Malevich, white was important as a color function. His subtle use of white emphasized the extraordinary sense of substance, tangibility and range of light value. A careful examination of his daring, "White on White, 1918," bears this out. (Figure 2)

Excerpts from an essay by Malevich published in the catalogue of 'The Tenth State Exhibition. Abstract Creation and Suprematism', Moscow, 1919, are as follows:

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[1]Canaday, loc. cit.

[2]Robert Herbert, Modern Artists on Art (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 92-102.

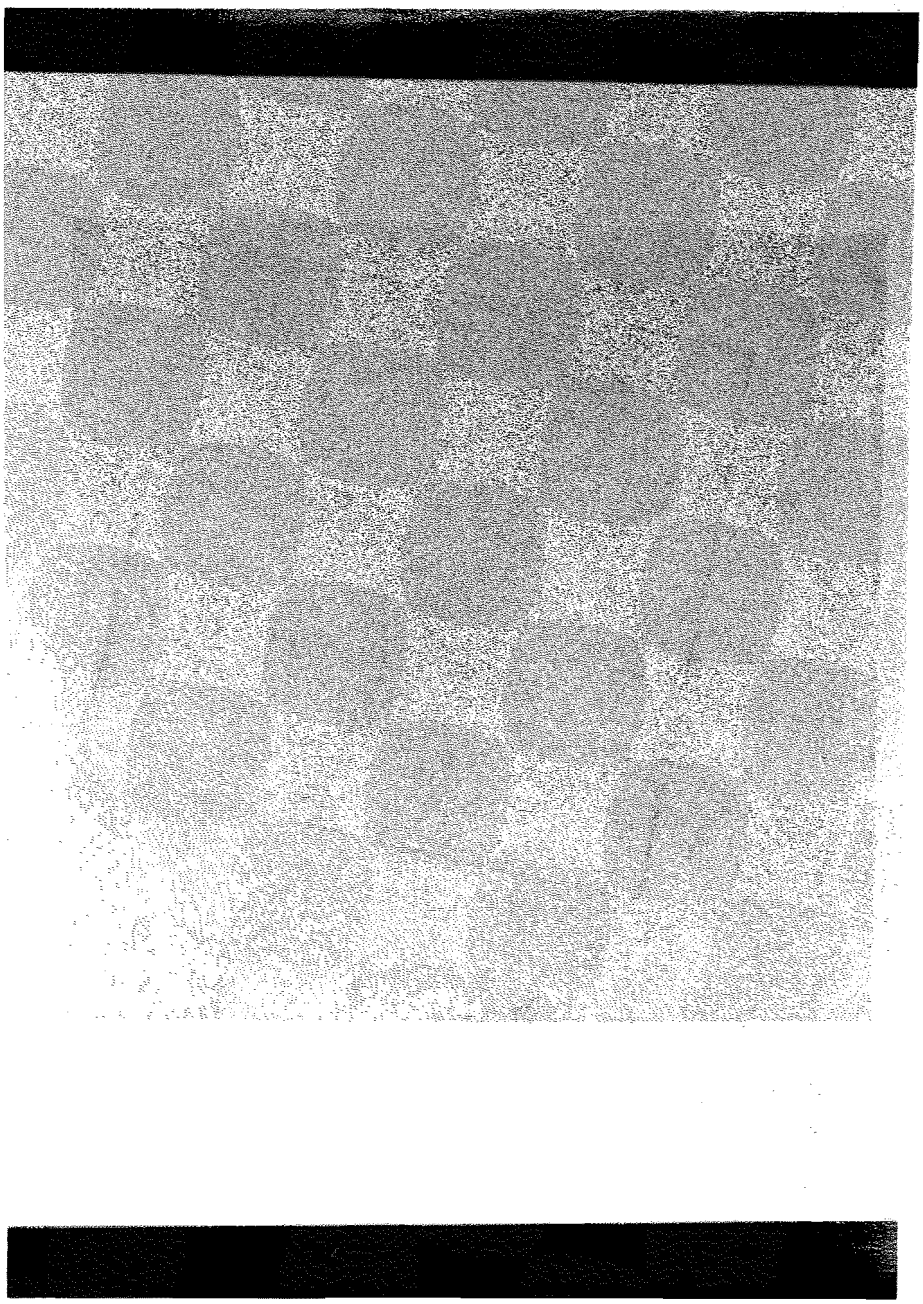

Figure 2. Oil painting, "White on White, 1918," by Kasimir Malevich. "Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

> The blue colour of clouds is overcome in the Suprematist system, ruptured and enters white as the true, real representation of infinity, and is therefore freed from the coloured background of the sky. . . . I have broken the blue boundary of colour limits, come out into white, beside me comrade-pilots, swim in this infinity, I have established the semaphore of Suprematism. I have beaten the lining of the coloured sky, torn it away and in the sack which formed itself, I have put colours and knotted it. Swim! The free white sea, infinity, lies before you.[1]

Of the three white on white compositions actually produced by Malevich, the 1918 version is the best known. This controversial painting was to be the acme of simplicity and delicacy. It was meant to convey sensibility of the absence of any object.

To quote Ella Winter's reaction:

> It dazzles and excites. It forces the realization that here was a man with extraordinary vision; a man who knew his old world was breaking up once for all, into indigestible fragments, which would have to be put together again in a new more fertile, synthesis. And he said it in his way, his creative artist's way.[2]

On the other hand, Faber Birren made the following comment:

> In the history of the art of color, Malevich will be remembered as the man who brought everything to a full stop up against a dead end. . . . A little Suprematism like a little Dadaism is good for the soul of

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[1]Gray, op. cit., pp. 283-284.

[2]Ella Winter, "The Lost Leadership of Malevich," Art News, LVII, No. 8 (December, 1958), 58.

> art-even if it leads to nowhere at all. Once absolutes are reached, however, (they were also reached by Mondrian) any repetition becomes tiresome and one has a good reason to suspect either opportunism or outright charlatanry. Malevich's "White on White" is an intellectual oddity. . . . The suspicion of either egomania or deliberate nonsense enters when the painter, who had been challenged by a critic to explain the significance of his art to the world, said, "My answer was that if he and others could read it properly, it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism.[1]

This painter's first response to the work is to the over-all texture of the painting. There is the feeling of the brushwork on the canvas--not brush strokes as in Oriental calligraphy, but brushwork that causes the viewer to feel the quality of an over-all pigment on a stretched canvas.

The all-white textured canvas emphasizes a subtle variation of white paint that is not seen in a black and white photograph of this work.

This painter was surprised at the contrast of the beige, tonal quality of the white background against the bluish-white square on top. Yet, the over-all whiteness of the canvas is retained. This dimension to the whiteness, with its varying lightness, implies the presence of all color.

The size and shape of the canvas is appropriate also. The square is a perfect rectangle, ($31\frac{1}{4}$ x $31\frac{1}{4}$). This

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[1]Faber Birren, History of Color in Painting (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1965), pp. 350-351.

painting, on extended loan from Russia, is hanging at the New York Museum of Modern Art. The black and white photograph of the painting, from the museum, has the following written on the back:

> Note: just how this painting should be hung and reproduced is uncertain: a photograph of a Malevich exhibition, probably Moscow, 1920, shows the painting hung with the square near the lower left hand corner. At present (1968), the painting is hung in the Museum galleries with the square nearest the upper right hand corner.[1]

This painter is studying the painting from the position of the 1920 hanging. Actually, the surface of this painting is most important. It is more alive than if a series of bold forms were placed upon it. One could even say that the surface itself has become the "subject" of the picture. The color of the subject is white and the shape of the subject is a square.

Since within this framework there is a square upon a larger square, one shall call the smaller square the object square. This square is placed on the background square ($31\frac{1}{4}$ x $31\frac{1}{4}$). These squares are very much related by the size, position, and subtle but variable edge that separates them. The importance of their relation is emphasized by the

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[1]From the photograph of Malevich's "White on White, 1918," (back) (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968).

indication of the touching--or near touching--of the squares. If the object square were placed any other way, this painter feels the result would not be as exciting and the equilibrium would be upset. Even the corners are fascinating as well as complex.

With the two squares related as they are, the object square takes on a suspended quality. With this the subject takes on form. Thus the airy quality of the background square gives a sense of freedom in movement.

The white surface of this painting has been broken with a distinctive line that is the edge of the object square. The quality of this line, as an edge, is enhanced by the direction and dark color. Technically, however, the line is not continuous or uniform. The series of small touches and brush strokes, that make up this line, permit the paint surface to be broken and to fluctuate into that atmospheric quality. Malevich would symbolize this white as sunlight or 'infinity'. He, in fact, expressed the following about the Suprematist composition:

> For the suprematist. . .the proper means is the one that provides the fullest expression of pure feeling and ignores the habitually accepted object. The object itself is meaningless to him; and the ideas of the conscious mind are worthless. Feeling is the decisive factor. I perceived that the 'thing' and the 'idea' were taken to be equivalents of feeling, and understood the lie of the world of will and idea. Is the milk bottle the symbol of milk?[1]

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[1]Herbert, op. cit., p. 95.

This nonobjective painting was genuine art in abstract.

A final note on this painter--he died of cancer in 1935. Malevich was buried in a coffin painted all over with Suprematist designs executed by himself.[1]

The painter of black and white, Franz Kline, (Figure 3), was born in 1910 at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. He was the son of a German immigrant and was named after the Austro-Hungarian Emperor.

Kline's art training was academically solie and conservative. Studies included Girard College, Philadelphia, Boston University, and Heatherlys School, London, England. Thus when he came to New York, in 1938, he was ready for what proved to be ten years of struggle for physical survival as well as for artistic development.

During these lean years, two patrons, David Orr and Dr. Edlich sustained Kline with purchases, commissions, friendship, and encouragement.[2]

His work of this time evolved from semi-representational small-scale sketches of Cubist-stylizations to large-scale abstraction in black and white.[3]

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[1]Gray, op. cit., p. 292.

[2]Daniel and Eugenia Robbins, "Franz Kline-Rough Impulsive Gesture," Studio International, CLXVII, No. 853 (May, 1964), 186.

[3]Robert Goldwater, "Franz Kline: Darkness Visible," Art News, LXVI, No. 1 (March, 1967), 41-42.

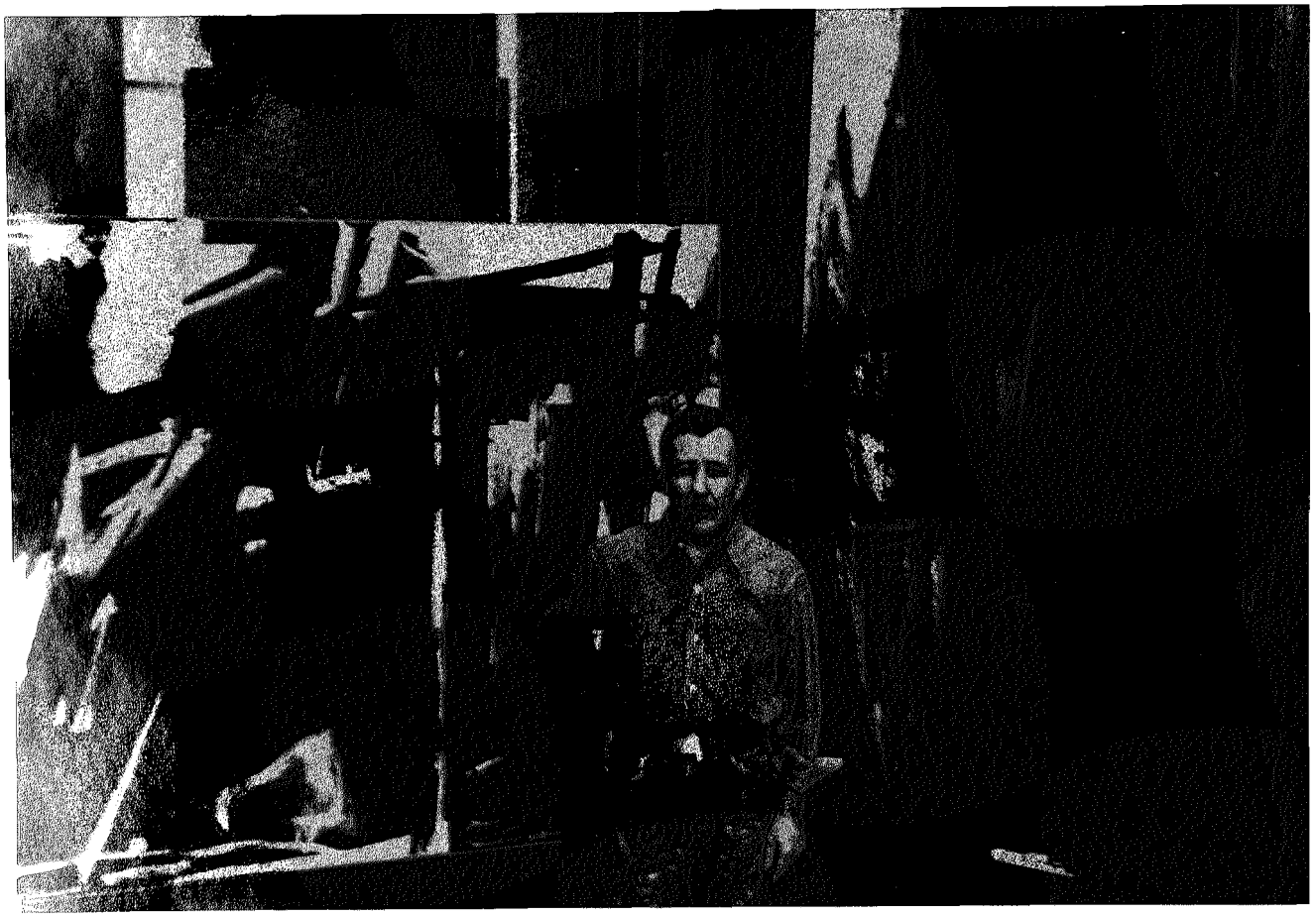

Figure 3. Franz Kline. Reproduced from Art News, (November, 1962), 29.

This mature style, which was found in about 1949 and developed in the following decade, had an interesting beginning.

> One day in '49, Kline dropped in on a friend who was enlarging some of his own small sketches in a Bell-Opticon. "Do you have any of those little drawings in your pocket?" the friend asked. Franz always did and supplied a handful. Both he and his friend were astonished at the change of scale and dimension when they saw the drawings magnified bodilessly against the wall. A 4 by 5-inch brush drawing of the rocking chair Franz had drawn and painted over and over, so loaded with implications and aspirations and regrets, loomed in gigantic black strokes which eradicated the image, the strokes expanding as entities in themselves, unrelated to any reality but that of their own existence. He fed in the drawings one after the other and, again and again, the image was engulfed by the strokes that delineated it.
>
> From that day, Franz Kline's style of painting changed completely. It was a total and instantaneous conversion, demanding completely different tools and paints and a completely different method of working with a completely different attitude toward his work. Any allegiance to formalized representation was wiped out of his consciousness. The work, from this moment, contradicts in every way all of the work that preceded it, and from which it had so logically and organically grown.[1]

Kline's black and white paintings, belonging to the classification of Abstract-Expressionism, mark him as one of the leading heroes of the New York School.

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[1]Elaine deKooning, "Franz Kline: Painter of His Own Life," Art News, LXI, No. 7 (November, 1962), 67-68.

Robert Goodnough's 1952 visit to Kline's Greenwich Village studio sheds some good insight into Kline's techniques and approaches with black and white.

First of all, he does not stretch his canvases on stretchers before painting them. Rather, they are tacked to studio walls. This is due to the fact that he pushes the brushes hard against the canvas when working. Also, Kline uses a canvas somewhat larger than planned to allow for any necessary additions. Stretchers can be made later.

Work is started in charcoal with long rapidly applied lines whipped across the canvas. These lines suggest the over-all movements in mind, but they are not outline shapes. The brief drawing process is proceeded immediately by application of paint. This is a continuous process without a break to avoid the loss of initial emotion.

Using house-painters brushes two or three inches wide, Kline would apply black enamel. Then using a clean brush, (He always kept his brushes immaculate when not in use.) he would apply areas of white in relation to the black areas. He would move to the black again. This process of changing from one to the other was so that neither of the two opposites might dominate the other. Kline paints rapidly, feeling that even with future changes, he must get out the

present intensity.[1]

Elaine deKooning has said of Kline's brush movement:

> It was Kline's unique gift to be able to translate the character and the speed of a one-inch flick of the wrist to a brush-stroke magnified a hundred times. (Who else but Tintoretto has been able to manage this gesture?) All nuances of tone, sensitivity of contour, allusions to other art are engulfed in his black and white insignia--as final as a jump from the top floor of a skyscraper.[2]

Or to quote Nello Ponente:

> Here we have a typical example of action painting. More evident perhaps in Kline than in any other American painter are the experience and validity of the hand's gesture and movement, and his ability to guide the self-revealing sign unerringly over the canvas.[3]

Goodnough continued to report that after Kline had worked for about three hours, on a painting, he would stop and think about his progress before continuing. This process was repeated over a period of days or months until the painting reached its final stage. Often other paintings were simultaneously worked upon.

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[1]Robert Goodnough, "Kline Paints a Picture," Art News, LI, No. 8 (December, 1952), 38.

[2]deKooning, op. cit., p. 68.

[3]Nello Ponente, Modern Painting--Contemporary Trends (New York: Skira Publishing Company, 1960), pp. 79-80.

Kline's paintings were done on coarse grain linen canvas. The paint was not applied heavily. The black areas were mat in effect due to the use of turpentine as thinner. Behlen's zinc white, a commercial house paint, was used from gallon cans. Some titanium was mixed in for better consistency. The whites appeared more thick and shiny than the blacks.[1]

As this painter observed the size and scale of some of Kline's work, he was impressed with the feeling of a spontaneous, unretouched record of an impulsive painter who with his broad, confident strokes, created a quick finalized statement. Yet, research reveals that these paintings were the result of long, hard struggles.

Kline made many preliminary black and white sketches, especially on old telephone books. When asked if he planned his compositions in advance, Kline replied:

> I do both. I make preliminary drawings, other times I paint directly, other times I start a painting and then paint it out so that it becomes another painting or nothing at all. If a painting doesn't work, throw it out. When I work from preliminary sketches, I don't just enthese drawings, but plan my areas in a large painting by using small drawings for separate areas. I combine them in a final painting, often adding to or subtracting from the original sketches.[2]

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[1]Goodnough, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

[2]Katharine Kuh, The Artist's Voice (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), p. 145.

This leads one to Kline's usage of space. Dore Ashton said:

> Within the limitations of black-to-white, Kline found many ways of suggesting levels in space, ranging from extensive matt effects to thick impastoes, from thinned and scumbled surfaces to shiny, impenetrable surfaces. Even in the scores of preliminary sketches, where you can sense him thinking with his brush, these instinctive devices are brought into play so that no single drawing, no matter how casual, is merely a black sign on a bearer surface.[1]

The above reference refers to Kline working in thick impastoes. His later work included this. Then also, Oriental calligraphy has been associated with Kline's work. Kline's reply to this was:

> No. I don't think of my work as calligraphic. Critics also describe Pollock and De Kooning as calligraphic artists, but calligraphy has nothing to do with us. It's interesting that the Oriental critics never say this. The Oriental idea of space is an infinite space; it is not painted space, and ours is. In the first place, calligraphy is writing, and I'm not writing. People sometimes think I take a white canvas and paint a black sign on it, but this is not true. I paint the white as well as the black, and the white is just as important.[2]

Kline did not consider himself a symbolist. His painting became the experience. He said, "I paint an

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[1]Dore Ashton, "New York Commentary," Studio International, CLXXIII, No. 889 (May, 1967), 264.

[2]Kuh, op. cit., p. 144.

organization that becomes a painting."[1] He may not have been a symbolist, but Kline was a 'colorist' as far as black and white were concerned. "In Kline's pictures," wrote Thomas B. Hess, "white and black count as colors, as they have done since Velazquez, but Kline eliminates all other hues."[2]

The more this painter looked at Kline's work, the more impressed he became with the subtlety of the variations on the black and white theme. The big black forms shoot out at you like a cannon exploding, yet they are kept under control and pulled back onto the picture surface by the skillful handling of the white. These basic forms are, "embodying forces that are supporting and collapsing, pushing and pulling."[3] Then the differing intensities of the light break through the interrupted, punctuated, and articulated forms of black and white. Thus there is created dynamic depth and richness of hue and value scale.

Finally to quote Elaine deKooning:

> As Kline continued to strive for the essentials in his work, his forms kept becoming more and more massive, the space more dense, as reverberating greys appeared along edges and crashed through blacks and whites, cementing them in increasingly complex structures. The big thing about Franz Kline's art is its

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ponente, op. cit., p. 79.

[3] Werner Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), I, 352.

> inclusiveness. He had an extraordinary gift for establishing intimacy through his art.[1]

This painter's confrontation with Kline's painting, "Slate Cross, 1961," (Figure 4), was a privileged and revealing experience. The amazing energy and certitude of the composition are enhanced by the size and scale of the work.

The slightly yellow tonal quality of the white paint was surprising. This painter was told by the curator at the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery that the poor quality of the commercial house paint had caused this yellowing. However, the over-all white against the stark black forms retains a good, contrasting light.

Note the forms themselves. The downward, irregular, sweep of black forms at the right and left sides of the rectangle are basically, asymmetrically balanced by contrasting areas of white on the rest of the canvas. The black left side of the painting is connected to the larger right areas of black by a irregular, horizontal sweep across the lower upper half of the composition. The white areas below the cross-bar are a continuation of the white above. The irregular placement of the white on the right edge of the canvas, as well as the white coming through the black on the lower left, all add to the successful composition within

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[1]deKooning, op. cit., p. 69.

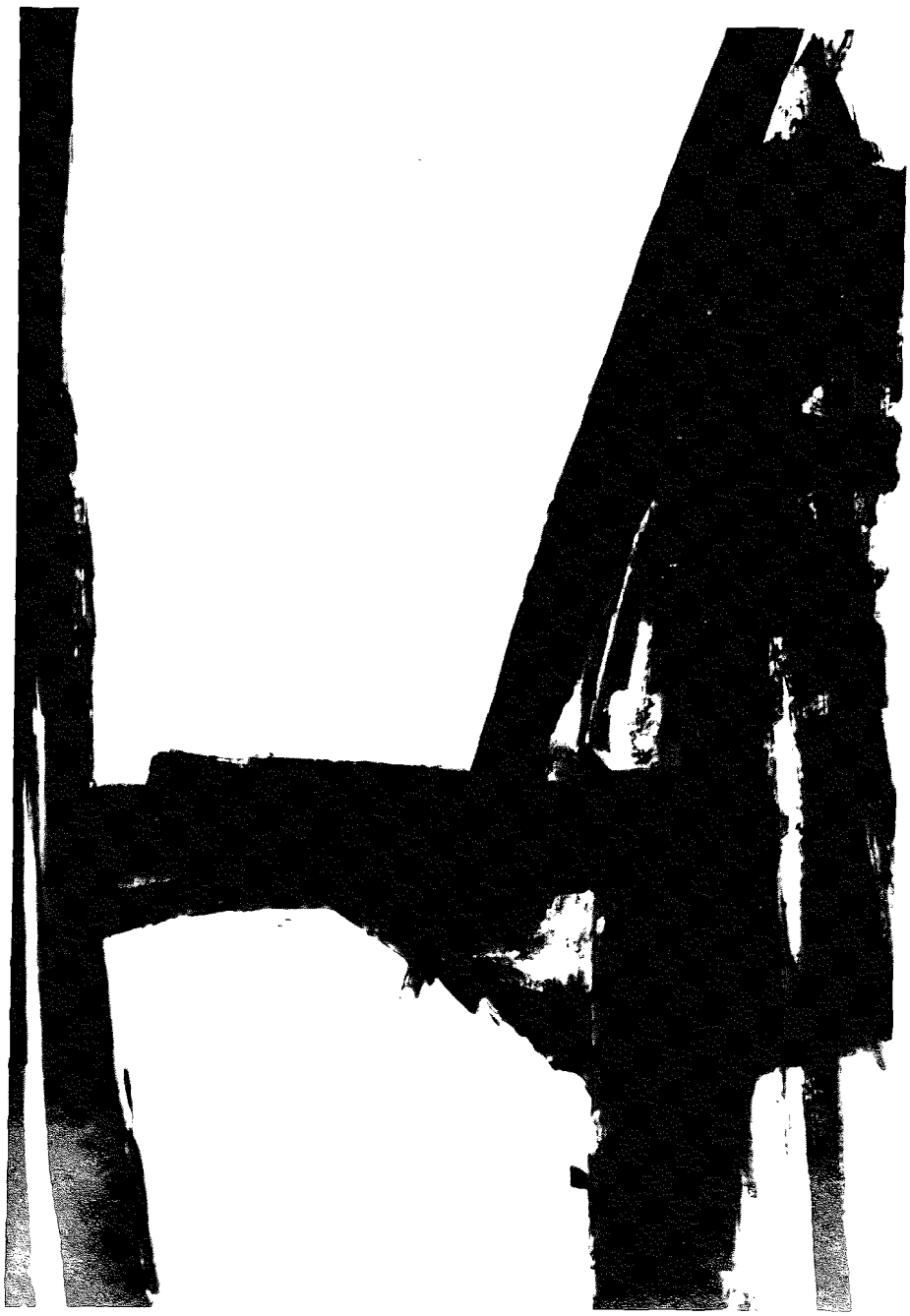

Figure 4. Oil painting, "Slate Cross, ca 1961," by Franz Kline. Collection of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Algur H. Meadows and the Meadows Foundation, Inc.

the surface area. Each form has its right place and neither color dominates the other.

The effect of the penetrations of the two colors through each other is not realized in this reproduction as was in the original work. In the original, tonal and textural qualities of the black, gray, and white stand out.

The previous statements of Kline's work in general certainly can apply to this painting.

The remarkable sense of a simultaneous, extreme flatness with a great depth, is one of the essentials that makes for richness of the massive forms. The forms are more massive than linear. However, the variance of edges on the forms (white or black) makes for a more total and complex composition. The way in which the various forms reach to the edge of the canvas is also intriguing.

The function of the black and white as color in this painting, as in all the others, reaches its potential significance, really, only in relation to the successful role of the other art elements.

A final comment on this painting can be applied by Kline's statement of his own work:

> You paint the way you have to in order to give, that's life itself, and someone will look and say it

> is the product of knowing, but it has nothing to do with knowing, it has to do with giving.[1]

Ad Reinhardt, (Figure 5), painter of black on black, is the last to be considered. He was born on Christmas Eve, 1913, in Buffalo, New York.[2] "He is fond of noting that his birth coincided with the climax of cubism and the birth of abstract art."[3]

Reinhardt's education stressed the history of art and art systems more than the art of painting. Formal education was from Queens, New York. College studies included Columbia Teacher's College, National Academy of Design Art School, and the Institute of Fine Arts in New York. Specific work under Francis Criss, Carl Holty, and Alfred Salmony advanced his development.[4]

Always an abstract painter, Reinhardt's four-step evolution, within this realm, led to his Classic black square paintings:

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[1]Frank O'Hara, "Franz Kline Talking," Evergreen Review, II, No. 6 (February, 1958), 27.

[2]Ad Reinhardt, "Chronology by Ad Reinhardt," Artform, VI, No. 2 (October, 1967), 46.

[3]David Bourdon, "Master of the Minimal," Life Magazine, LXIII, No. 7 (September, 1967), 52.

[4]Allen S. Weller, Art USA Now (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 269.

Figure 5. Ad Reinhardt. Reproduced from the catalogue on Ad Reinhardt. Courtesy of the Jewish Museum, New York.

(a). Late-Classical-Mannerist Post-Cubist Geometric-Abstractions of the late '30s;
(b). Rococo-Semi-Surrealist Fragmentation and 'all-over' Baroque-Geometric-Expressionist patterns of the early '40s;
(c). Archaic color-brick-brushwork Impressionism and black-and-white Constructivist calligraphies of the late '40s;
(d). Early-Classical Hieratical red, blue, black monochrome square-cross-beam symmetries of the early '50s.[1]

In studying Reinhardt's work, the main emphasis will be these uniform, black, square paintings. These "ultimate"[2] paintings were first conceived in the early '60s.

The paintings appear as a horizontal rectangle crossing a vertical rectangle at the center. This is essentially cruciform in appearance, though not necessarily in construction. The arrangement of rectangles, resulting from a repeated three-way division of the canvas space, creates the composition. The vertical is implied through color only.[3] Priscilla Colt remarked, "It is indicative of Reinhardt's ingrained traditionalism that the horizontal band of the cruciform overlaps the vertical."[4]

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[1]Harris Rosenstein, "Black Pastures," Art News, LXV, No. 7 (November, 1966), 34.

[2]Ibid. [3]Weller, op. cit., p. 270.

[4]Priscilla Colt, "Notes on Ad Reinhardt," Art International, VIII, No. 8 (October, 1964), 34.

Reinhardt's own description of his square "black" paintings, "with the usual exasperating redundancies whose humor takes the curse off his seriousness,"[1] is revealing:

> A square (neutral, shapeless) canvas, five feet wide, five feet high, as high as a man, as wide as a man's outstretched arms (not large, not small, sizeless), trisected (no composition), one horizontal form negating one vertical form (formless, no top, no bottom, directionless), three (more or less) dark (lightless) non-contrasting (colorless) colors, brushwork brushed out to remove brushwork, a mat, flat, free-hand painted surface (glossless, textureless, non-linear, no hard edge, no soft edge) which does not reflect its surroundings--a pure, abstract non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting--an object that is self-conscious (no unconsciousness) ideal, transcendent, aware of no thing but Art (absolutely no anti-art). 1961. . . .[2]

To quote Thomas B. Hess, "It seems certain that Reinhardt got the ideas of blackness and symmetry from Barnett Newman, whose first show included an all-black painting."[3]

It should be clarified that Reinhardt actually painted only black paintings after the early 'fifties'. However, since the early 'sixties', they have been the one size, five feet square.[4] The so-called black paintings before 1960,

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[1]Rosenstein, op. cit., p. 72.

[2]Colt, op. cit., p. 32.

[3]Thomas B. Hess, "Editorial," Art News, LXVI, No. 6 (October, 1967), 23.

[4]Ad Reinhardt, "Reinhardt Paints a Picture," Art News, LXIV, No. 1 (March, 1965), 39-40.

gave way to progressively closer and darker values, larger and fewer shapes; from asymmetry to symmetry, and to the extreme reductiveness . . . the 'ultimate'.[1]

Lippard related these paintings to Malevich:

> Any discussion of modernist monotone painting must emphasize the central role of Ad Reinhardt, whose square, black, symmetrically and almost invisibly trisected paintings are, according to him, "the last paintings that anyone can paint." Reinhardt is virtually the first artist since Malevich to develop extensively the classical possibilities of the single surface.[2]

However, Kynaston McShine said that because the 'black' paintings are not black, Reinhardt's work is not monochromatic and, therefore contrary to his written assertions, Reinhardt cannot claim them to be 'ultimate'.[3] Maybe this is not too significant if what Priscilla Colt said was true:

> Yet, despite their extreme reductiveness and their refusal to reward formal dissection, analysis does reveal that the squares retain everything usually regarded as indispensable to the form of the Western easel painting, vestigial though the remains are. We still find: (1) the delimited, movable picture surface, (2) differentiation of color, value, and texture, (3) a resulting figure-ground relationship, and (4) spatial illusion.[4]

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[1]Colt, op. cit., p. 33.

[2]L. R. Lippard, "Silent Art," Art in America, LV, (January, 1967), 62.

[3]Kynaston McShine, "More than Black," Arts Magazine, XXXXI, No. 3 (December, 1966), 49.

[4]Colt, loc. cit.

In experiencing one of these black paintings, Lawrence Campbell said:

> In order to see these paintings at all, one must give at least five minutes undivided attention to each. . . . In daylight what is black at first, reveals itself in planes of color, in simple yet subtle and purposeful relationships.[1]

As this painter studied several of these black paintings at the Museum of Modern Art, he was aware that the 'black' was rarely dead black. The slight variations in the mat surfaces of the paintings varied from blue-black to ocher-black. The tones of purple, blue, red-brown, et cetera, were studied in terms of value and chroma. From the earlier paintings evolved darker colors and closer-valued compositions with the latter becoming more of a unity. However, none of the paintings were 'color-less'.

Tom Hess has well stated:

> The black squares have a flicker to them, not an after-image--because the flicker is there, in front of you, in the paint--but a kind of tangible resonance. One square will whisper "Lemon Yellow". Another, age is transmitted from the pristine surfaces so faintly, yet so precisely, that you become convinced that this eerie intensity is his content; and then the cross shape seems less funereal, marking not the gravestone of art, but a symbol of its redemption in continuity.[2]

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[1]Rosenstein, loc. cit.

[2]Hess, loc. cit.

Even though he was called the 'Black Monk' of Abstract-Expressionism by Harold Rosenberg,[1] Reinhardt claimed, "There is no religion in my art."[2] It is interesting to note, however, that the cross, with all its implications, is the basic form in these compositions.

Reinhardt, one of the long-recognized leaders of the New York School, used Bocour Oils on Belgian linen canvas.[3] Also, he framed his own pictures. The frames of the black paintings are exactly the 'black' of the surface of the painting.[4] Reinhardt would create the velvety, matte surface by draining all of the oil from the paint. This, of course, made the canvases extraordinarily susceptible to fingerprints.[5]

With the above, interesting, but technical considerations mentioned, let one contemplate Reinhardt's "Ultimate Painting, 1960," (Oil on canvas, 59" x 59"), (Figure 6).

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Phyllisann Kallick, "An Interview with Ad Reinhardt," Studio International, CLXXIV, No. 895 (December, 1967), 271.

[3] Reinhardt, op. cit., p. 40.

[4] Lippard, op. cit., p. 52.

[5] Ibid., p. 53.

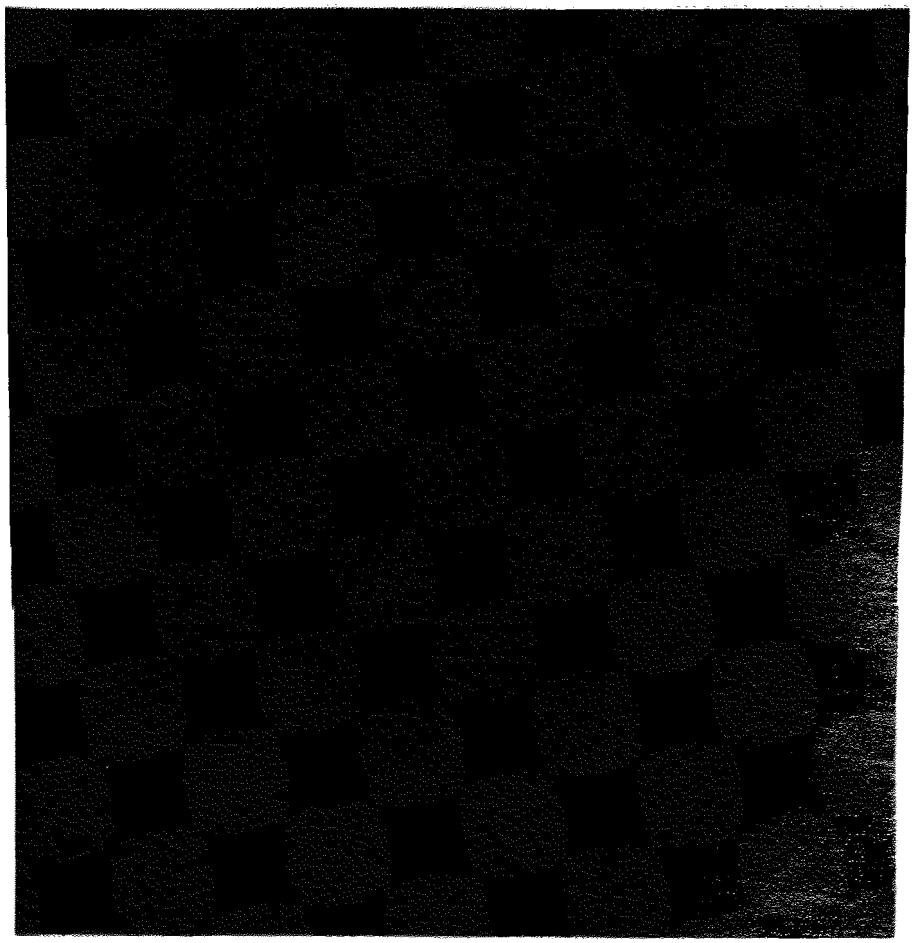

Figure 6. Oil painting, "Ultimate Painting, ca 1960," by Ad Reinhardt. Reproduced from Studio International Magazine, CLXXIV, No. 895 (December, 1967), 265.

In general, all that has been said about the other 'ultimate' paintings can be applied to this particular work.

This painting is composed of a bluish-green black vertical band overlapped by a ochre-black horizontal band, both on a violet-red black background. The colors are a dull mat quality. However, the reproduction indicates a shiny surface.

The horizontal band is slightly more distinctive (not much) than the subtle vertical band that is implied more by unified color. The over-all appearance, however, gives one the feeling of the 'ultimate' black.

Then too, the function of color is magnified by the simplicity of the dark, textureless, and fragile surface.

As Barbara Rose has stated:

> Using Reinhardt's own critical method, I will say what these paintings are not: They are not vulgar, cheap, easy, petty, banal, fragmented, jazzy, contemporary or everyday. THEY ARE WHOLE, PROFOUND AND BEAUTIFUL.[1]

Lippard asked the final question:

> The question inevitably raised by work as radically reductive as Reinhardt's is "how far can it go?" or "Where will it all end?" No one knows but the artists who will someday, maybe tomorrow, go further. Much the same thing was said about Malevich's White on White, which turned out to be the beginning rather than the end of a new art.[2]

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[1]Barbara Rose, "Americans 1963," Art International, VII, No. 7 (September, 1963), 77.

[2]Lippard, op. cit., p. 53.

CHAPTER IV

AN ANALYSIS OF FIVE RELATED STUDIO PAINTINGS

In analyzing the symbolic intent of the three artists discussed in the previous chapter, the following facts are significant.

1. Malevich claimed that in painting, the object was meaningless and must give way to pure feeling. He said, "Feeling after all, is always and everywhere the one and only source of every creation."[1]
2. Reinhardt, called the Black Monk of Abstract-Expressionism, claimed no religion in his art though his black paintings contained a cross.
3. Kline said he was not a symbolist but there was imagery in his work.

With these points in mind, this painter was asking how the artists have influenced his studio work.

To begin with, the classical possibilities of the single surface as a subject are significant. This type of subject can be related especially to Malevich and Reinhardt. Thus the subject (object) does become meaningful

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[1]Robert Herbert, Modern Artists on Art (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 95.

regardless of Malevich's words to the contrary. Such emphasis for a subject may be debatable but possible. Ruth Gikow made an interesting comment along this line:

> I deplore the fact that when the audience finally and reluctantly does accept subject matter, it must be within the current group think. I deplore the fact that the general public has grown both blind and deaf to the presence of other elements which may preoccupy the artist.[1]

Then to quote Balcomb Greene:

> There must be a love of the subject, and a respect for it, to achieve a presentation more real than the thing itself can seem, so that the painter's techniques of pigment and brush can be done with affection.[2]

With this subject one gives color. As the three artists used black and white as color so the abstract painters of today vision the importance of color. To quote Theodore Stamos:

> The great figurative painters were involved with grandeur of vision, using the figure as a means to an end, whereas today the best of the abstract painters are also involved with a grandeur of vision using color as their means toward a new light.[3]

With these shapes one becomes necessarily involved with space. The Oriental idea of space was absorbed by

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[1]Allen S. Weller, Art USA Now (2 vols.; New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 294.

[2]Ibid., p. 140. [3]Ibid., p. 366.

Malevich but not by Kline who felt his space was painted space. This painter attempted the same concept of space in his, "Black with White".

Kline's techniques with his materials as well as the importance he placed on the ritual of painting itself were exciting. Richard Pousette - Dart had remarked:

> My own painting is a direct experience with my materials. However, once a painting is begun, it seems to rise above these things (whatever they may be) and grows or evolves of its own accord.[1]

Of course, as this painter's work evolved, it was also influenced by his own intuition. Fritz Glarner saw the importance of this. He remarked: "My art relies wholly on intuition. This stands to reason, for what could be more intuitive than the careful adjustments of relationships until they "feel right"?[2]

Here Malevich and Glarner were in accord.

So this writer's paintings became a visual language as the result of the interrelationship of concept, intuition, and techniques. They are expressed in terms of color, value, line, form, or shape. No meaningless objects, Oriental spaces, imagery, or cruciforms were considered.

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[1] Ibid., p. 306.

[2] Dore Ashton, "Fritz Glarner," Art International, LXXI, No. 1 (January, 1963), 49.

This painter may have had subconscious symbolic reasoning for executing his paintings in the way he did, but he was not aware of it. Maybe the act of painting itself was unconsciously symbolic. As Samuel Adler has said:

> I believe that a work must necessarily be its own justification. It must be an organic entity with a life of its own. I have striven to transcend the 'picture' and to make the 'act of painting' the tool of my emotion.[1]

To this the words of Nathan Oliveira find a harmonious assent: "I do not pretend, through painting, to defend popular attitudes, but rather hope that my efforts are true to myself alone."[2]

Thus the following study of this painter's techniques is significant only to the extent of supplementing and clarifying what has been stated.

The five studio paintings were executed on Single Prime Jute Canvas of a rough surface. Each of the stretched single primed canvases received an additional two coats of Permanent Pigments Liquitex Gesso.

Upon this surface was drawn (in charcoal pencil) the outline forms of the compositions. All the paintings are nonobjective.

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[1]Weller, op. cit., p. 80.

[2]Ibid., p. 450.

Synthetic Liquitex was the painting media. Paint from tubes was thinned to a "gravy" consistency with water. Application was made first with bristle brushes and followed with sable brushes. The drying of this paint, on the canvas, created a desired "matt" finish on all the surfaces.

The following colors were used with Mars Black and Titanium White for tinting and shading purposes. The fourteen hues used were:

1. Acra Red
2. Burnt Umber
3. Cadmium Orange
4. Cadmium Yellow Medium
5. Chrome Green Oxide
6. Cobalt Blue
7. Dioxazine Purple
8. Napthol ITR Red Light
9. Permanent Green Light
10. Phthalocyanine Blue
11. Phthalocyanine Green
12. Raw Umber
13. Red Oxide
14. Ultramarine Blue

To concentrate on areas of color and minimize the emphasis on line, all areas of each painting were bordered

by "hard edge" lines. Each of these different areas of color was twice covered to clarify the intended hue. Thus the function of color was magnified by the simplicity of the flat planes of color on the almost textureless surfaces. Texture was permitted to the extent of the rough canvas grain. The over emphasis of texture was not to be made by the addition of brush strokes.

Preliminary preparation to the paintings also consisted of making two color charts. One chart shows example swatches of white tinted with selected colors. (Figure 7) Example swatches of toned blacks make up the second chart. (Figure 8) Evaluation of these charts was a determining factor in the selection of colors used.

The titles and sizes of the five paintings are as follows:

1. "White on White, 1968" 38" x 27"
2. "Black with White, 1968" 63" x 48"
3. "Black on Black, No. I" 63" x 48"
4. "Black on Black, No. II" 63" x 48"
5. "Black on Black, No. III" 64" x 50"

These paintings will be analyzed in the above order.

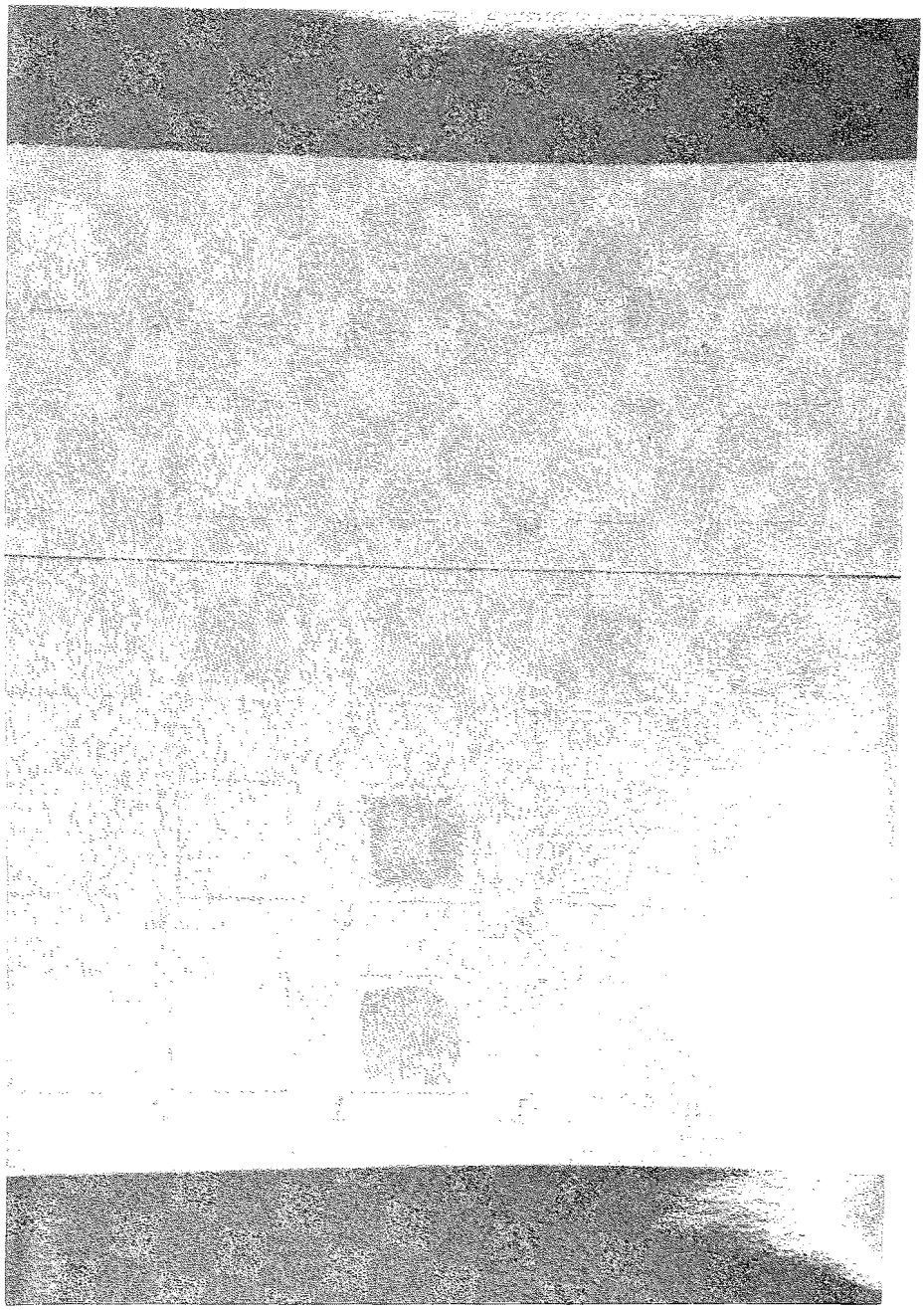

Figure 7. A white color chart.

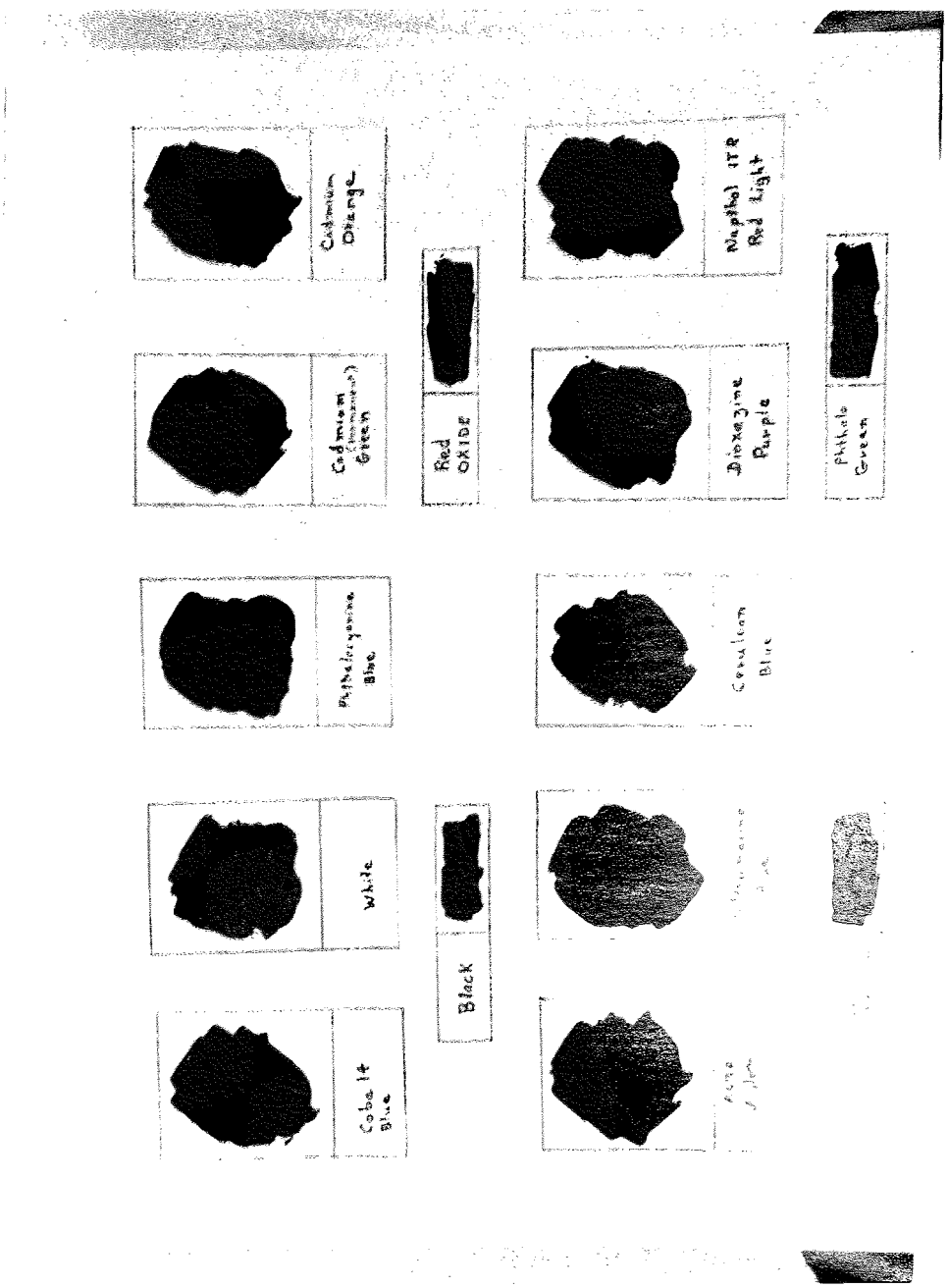

Figure 8. A black color chart.

I. "WHITE ON WHITE, 1968"

In this painting, (Figure 10) it was felt that the canvas size, (38" x 27") was the most effective for the intended use of white.

The choice of composition was for all straight but slanted lines. No curved lines were used. In this way a sense of suspended tension was meant to be achieved. Also this made a more exciting composition. See the outline diagram, (Figure 9).

Pure white pigment, on the canvas, gave an undesirable chalky, and pasty quality. Therefore, all whites were tinted. The delicacy of these pastel whites is observed in the over-all penetrating white canvas. A trace of chosen color into the white caused sufficient tinting in each area.

The value of each area of color, bordered by the "hard edge" line, is balanced by the size and shape of that area in relation to the surrounding areas.

The outline diagram, (Figure 9) records the tone of color used for each area of white on the canvas. These subtle tonal qualities of comparative lightness help to break the flatness of the picture plane. Here again, the surface has become the "subject" of the picture. This "subject," with its varying degrees of lightness indicates

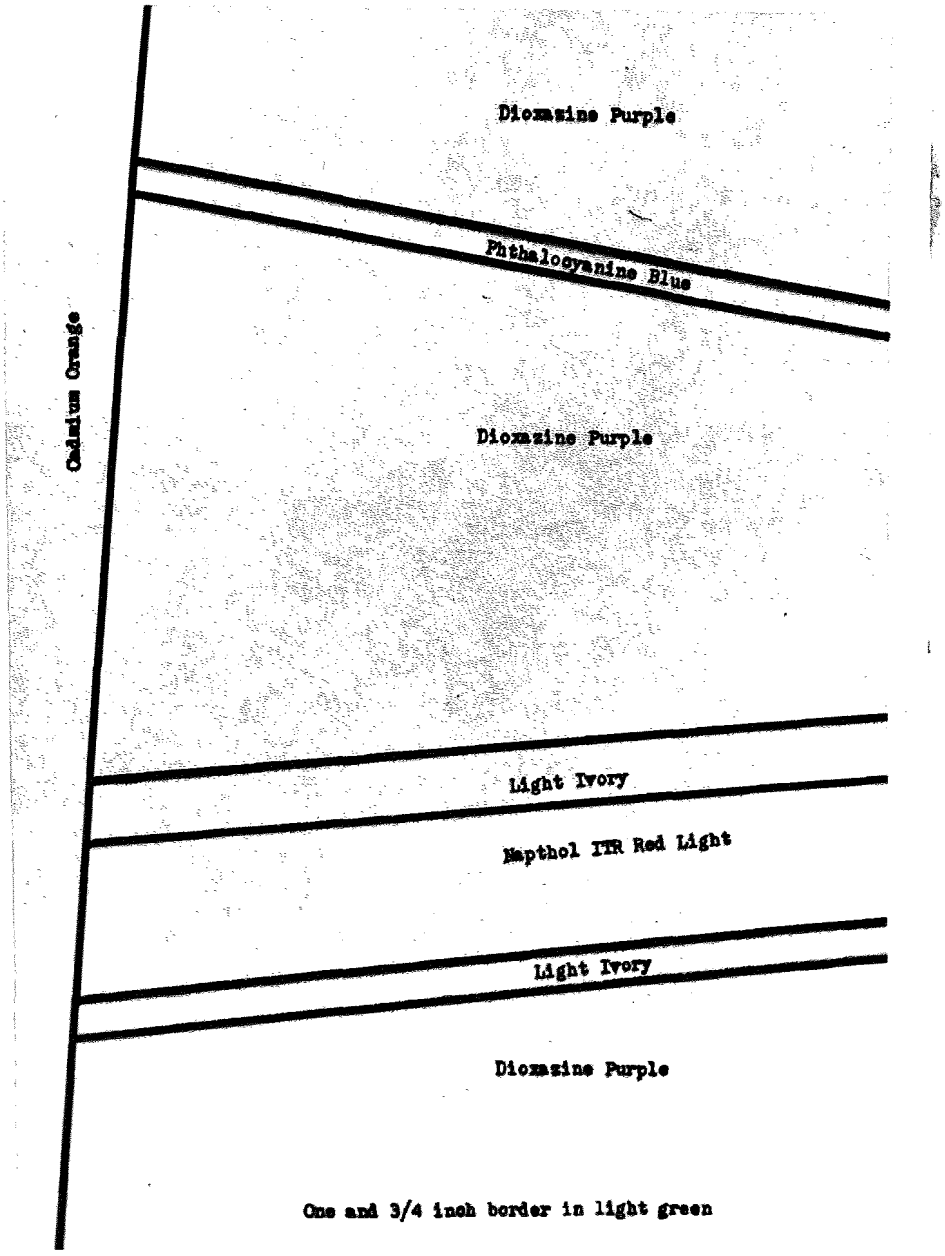

Figure 9. Outline diagram for, "White on White, 1968."

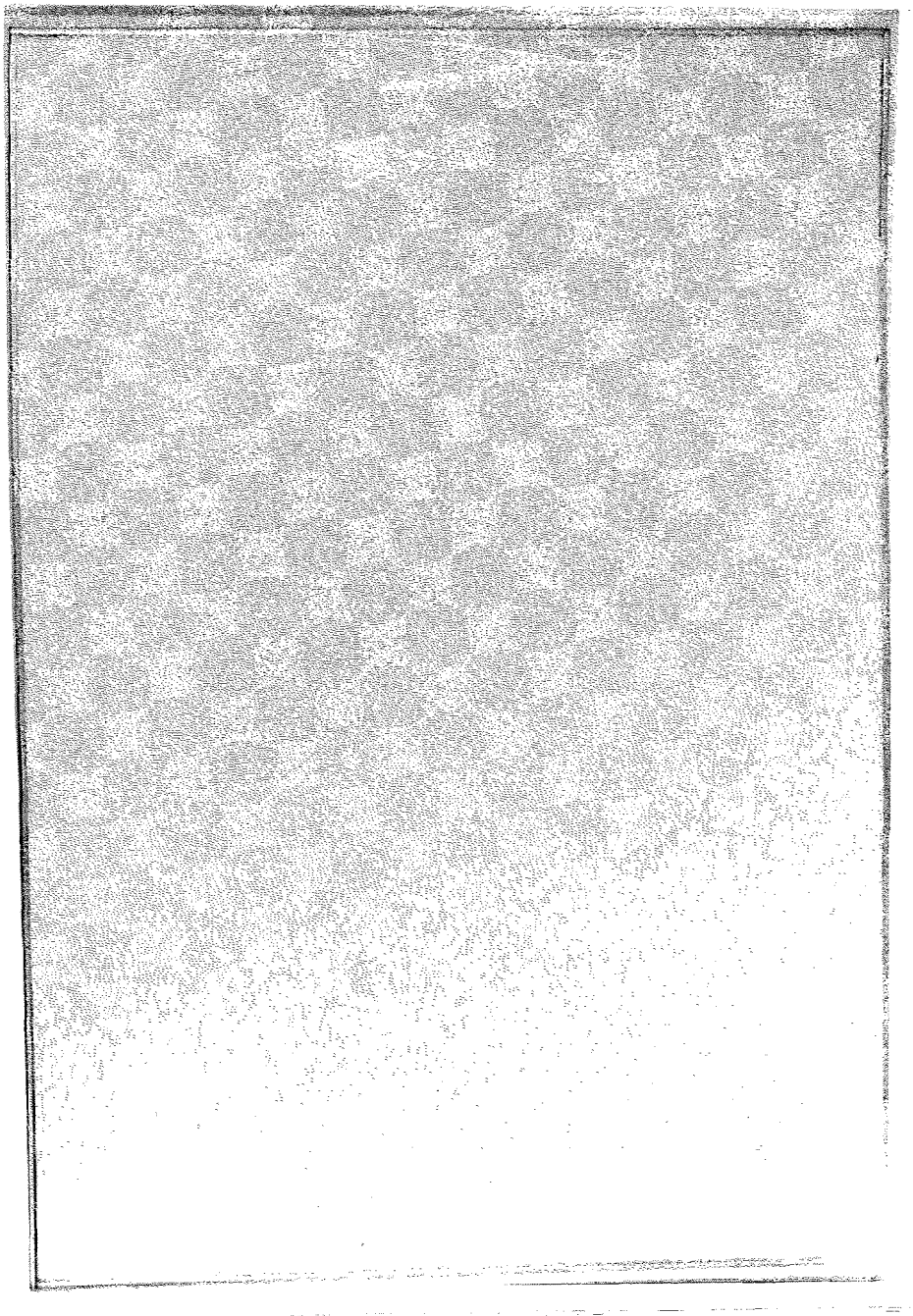

Figure 10. Acrylic painting, "White on White, 1968," by the writer.

the presence of all color and illustrates the real function of the white pigment.

The symbolic implication that Malevich would apply to these whites is not applicable to this work. A technical and visual experience only was achieved.

II. "BLACK WITH WHITE, 1968"

A larger canvas, (63" x 48") was felt to be more appropriate for this painting, (Figure 12). Kline, also, worked on rough grained canvas. However, where Kline added more textures, by brush strokes, this painter considered the grain texture sufficient.

Within this composition, most forms were curved with some straight-edged areas having irregularities in shape. All these forms are bordered by the "hard edge" line. The larger areas of comparative size stand out as equally balanced in contrasting color. The direction of these various shapes determines the tension created.

The areas of white were pastel-tinted to enforce a visual concept of subtle variety within these whites. One may feel the whites were too pastel in color. Here the formula was approximately 1/8 chosen color to 7/8 white pigment. These tonal areas of white standing against a pure white canvas made the pastels too strong. However, the

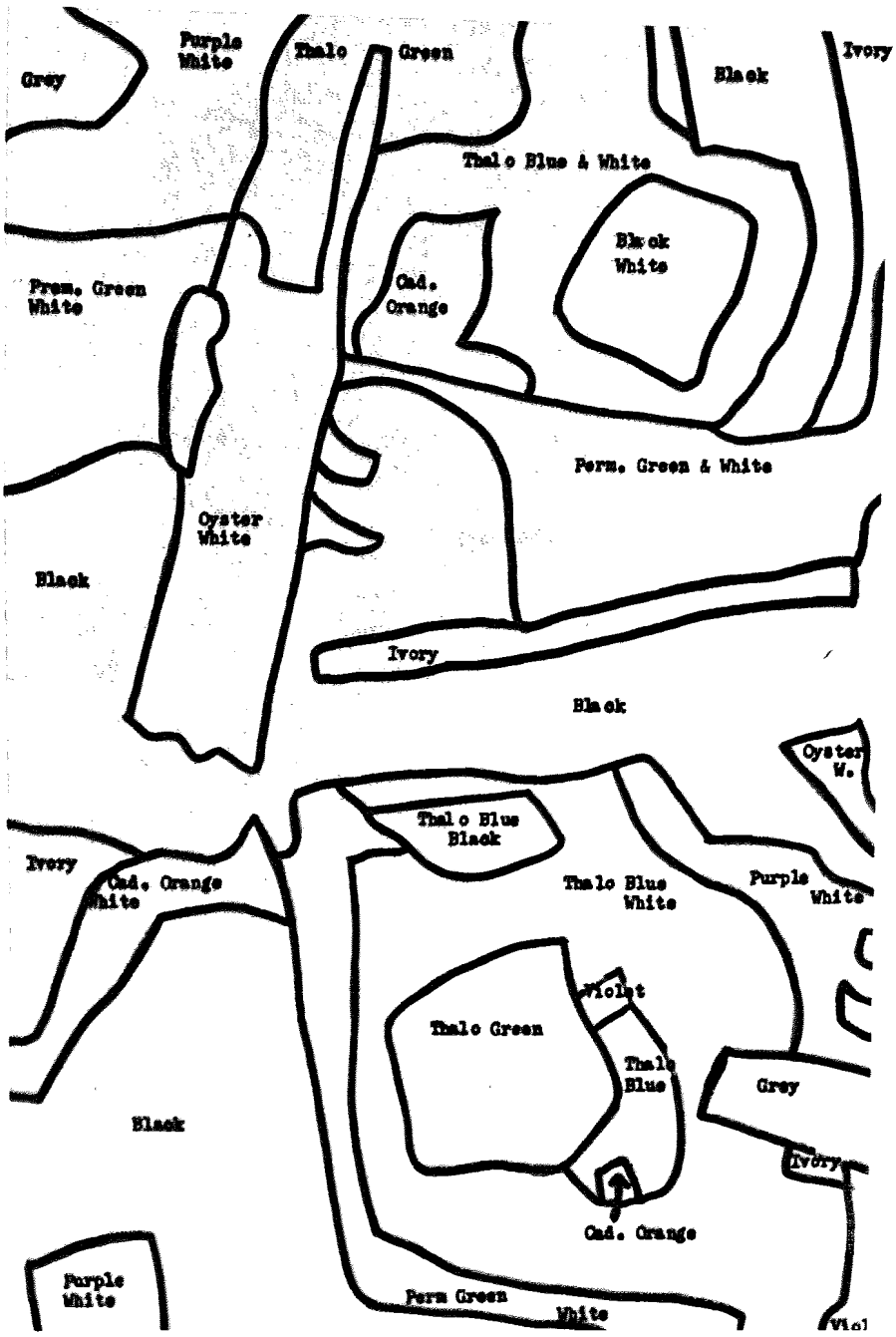

Figure 11. Outline diagram for, "Black with White, 1968."

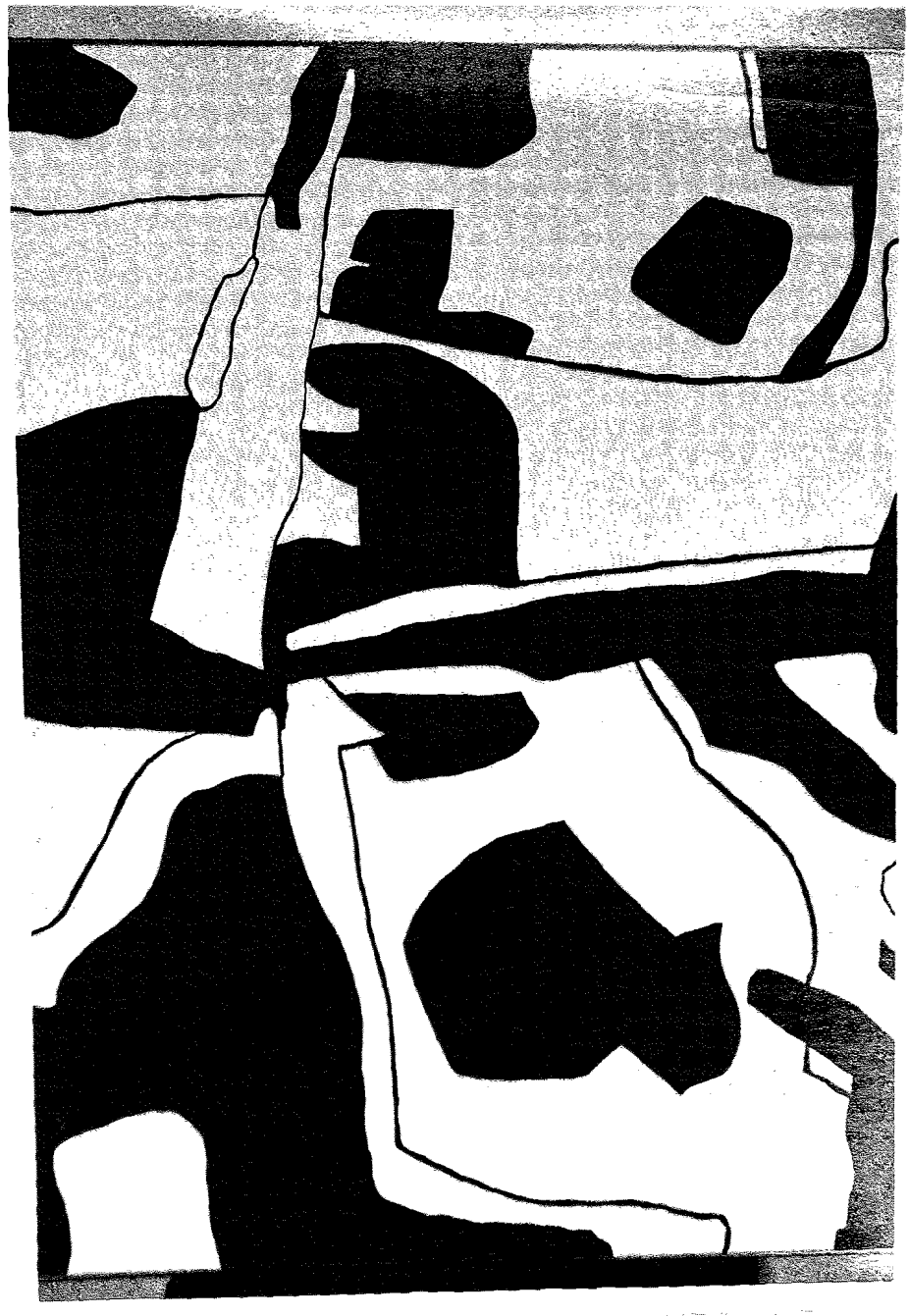

Figure 12. Acrylic painting, "Black with White, 1968," by the writer.

whites here were not intended to be as pure or as penetrating as on the ultimate, "White on White, 1968." Here an attempt was made to go as far as possible within the realm of white without having to consider it another color. The added forms of shaded blacks created a dazzling contrast strong enough to retain the over-all white effect and still draw attention to the pastel qualities within the whites.

The outline diagram, (Figure 11) shows the color tones used for each canvas area.

Please note that this painter entitled this work, "Black with White," rather than, "Black on White." Instead of creating the Oriental idea of space as an infinite space, only a surface depth was meant to be achieved. The flat planes of white were not to be overlapped by areas of black or vice versa. Rather, the attempt was made to create the sense of one color next to another color. Only within the realm of the variations within each color was the flatness of the picture plane meant to be broken beneath the surface. At the same time the contrasting shapes of the black next to the white was to be only a surface depth. Another viewer, however, may not interpret this visual experience in this way.

Here the function of color is magnified by the crisp contrasting values of subtly-shaded black next to the pastel whites. Also the similarity of values within each area

creates a more thorough and exciting composition.

Kline did not consider himself a symbolist. His paintings were experiences from the result of organization. This concept was applied to this painting.

III. THREE BLACK ON BLACK PAINTINGS

To clarify the discussion of these paintings, reference to them will be made by number, as Painting No. I, No. II, or No. III.

The canvas size was 63" x 48" for Painting No. I and No. II. The ultimate, "Black on Black, No. III," is slightly larger at 64" x 50".

The basic format or composition of the three paintings is the same. Painting No. III has a slight variation. (See Figures 13, 15, and 17.)

All forms or shapes on each canvas are curved. Space levels, of various degrees, were created with the subtle color variations of tinted blacks. The breaking up of flat planes in Paintings No. I and No. II was to create a penetrating feeling of space beneath the surface. However, Painting No. III was to have only a surface depth. The surface here, was the subject also.

With Painting No. I, (Figure 14) this painter attempted to go as far as possible within the realm of black without having to consider it another color. Here,

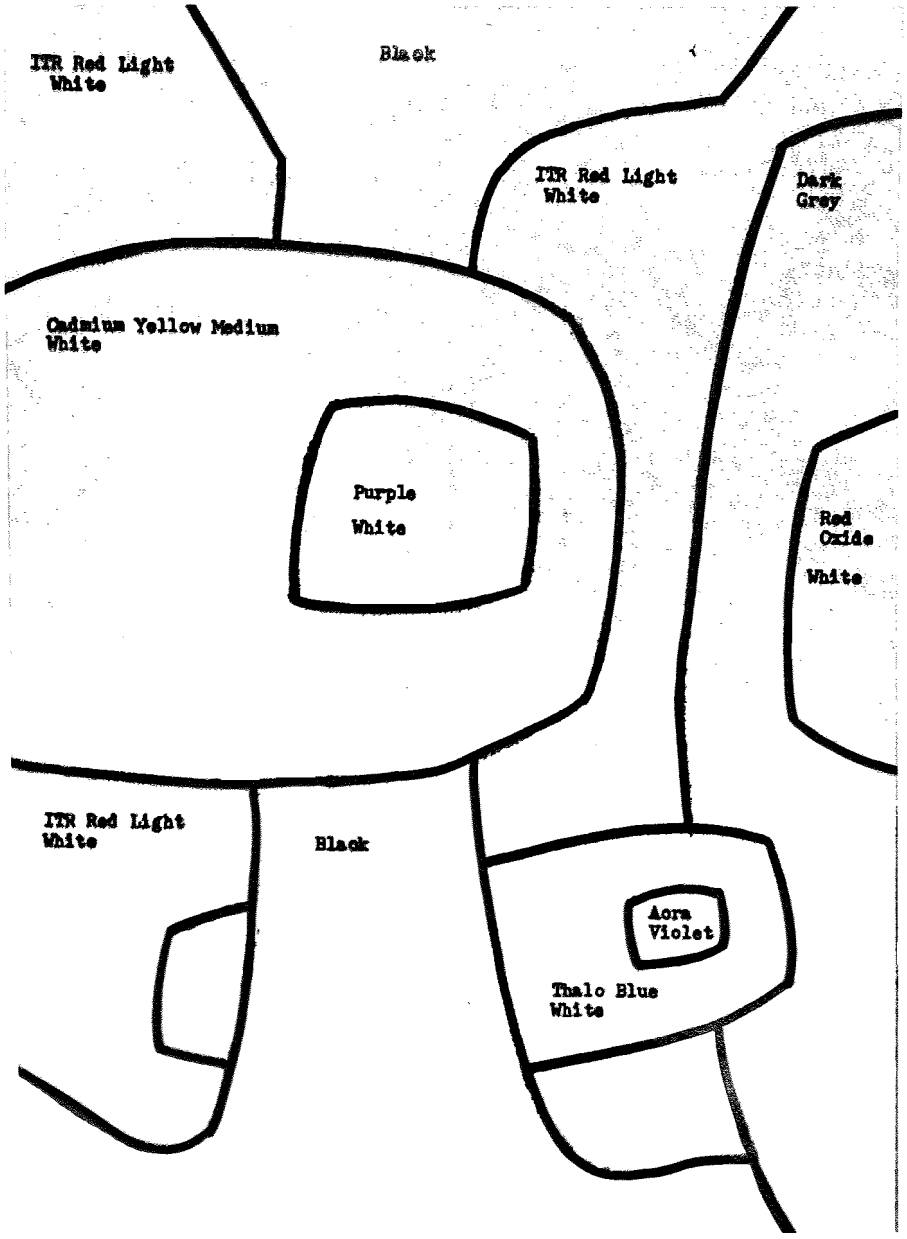

Figure 13. Outline diagram for, "Black on Black, No. I."

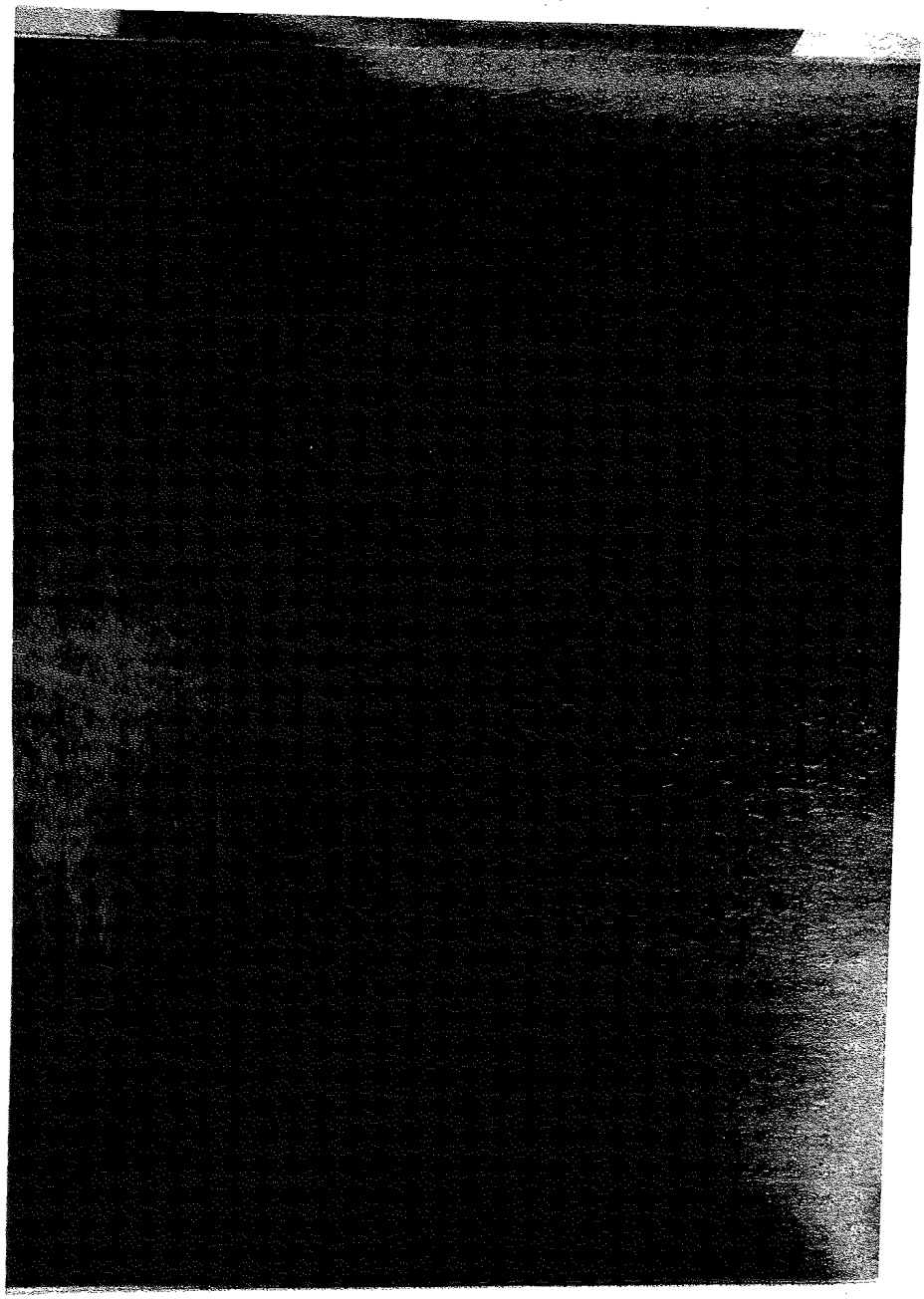

Figure 14. Acrylic painting, "Black on Black, No. I," by the writer.

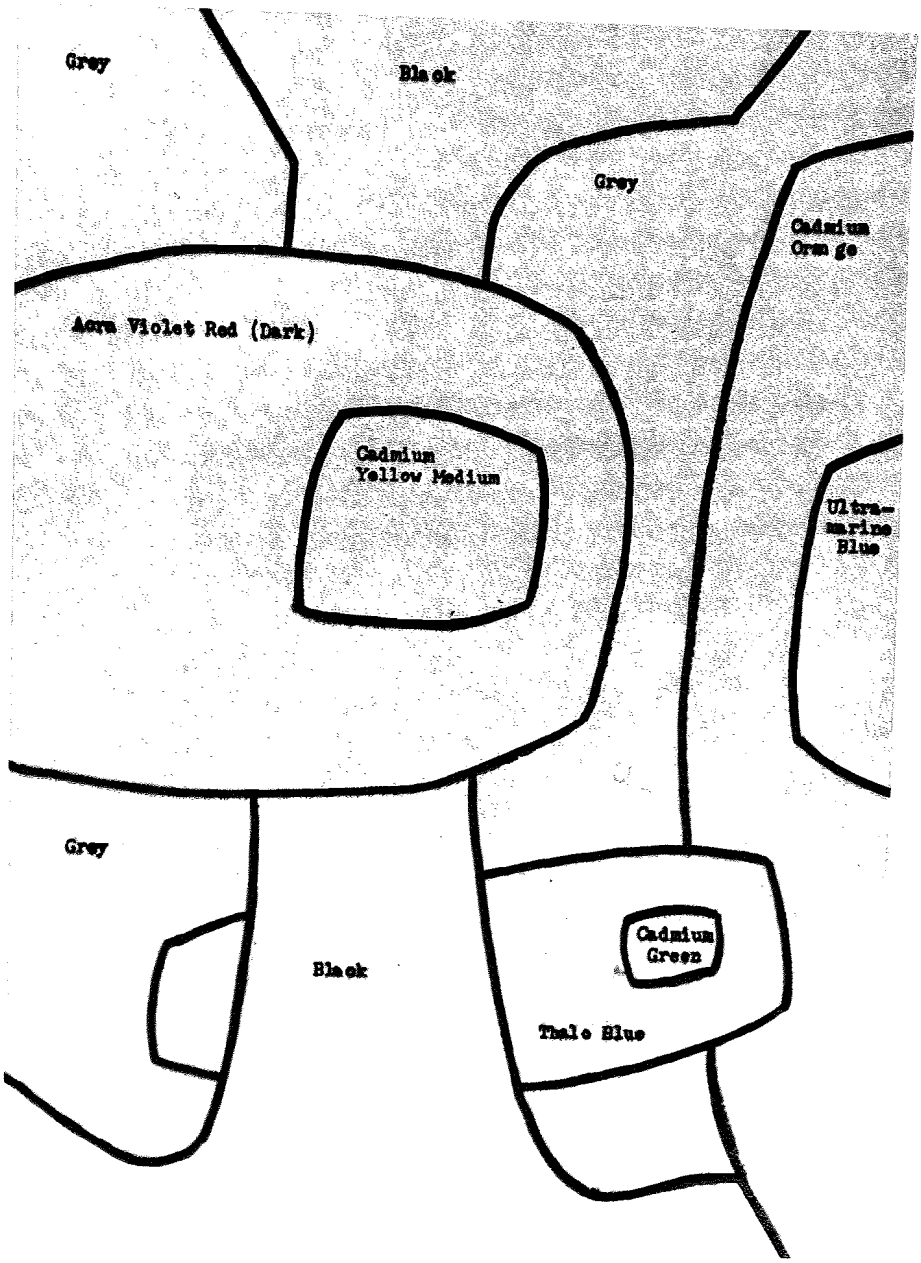

Figure 15. Outline diagram for, "Black on Black, No. II."

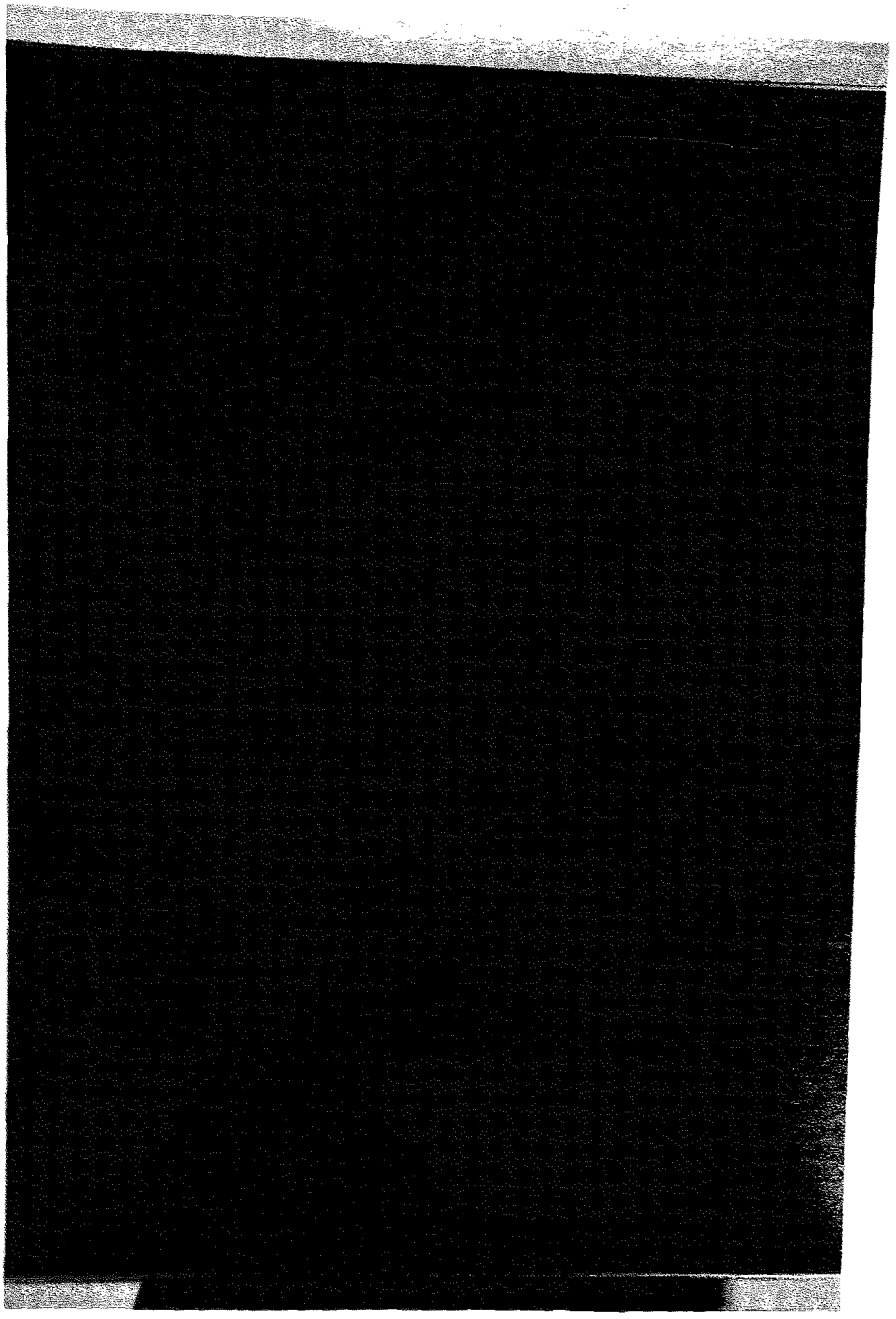

Figure 16. Acrylic painting, "Black on Black, No. II," by the writer.

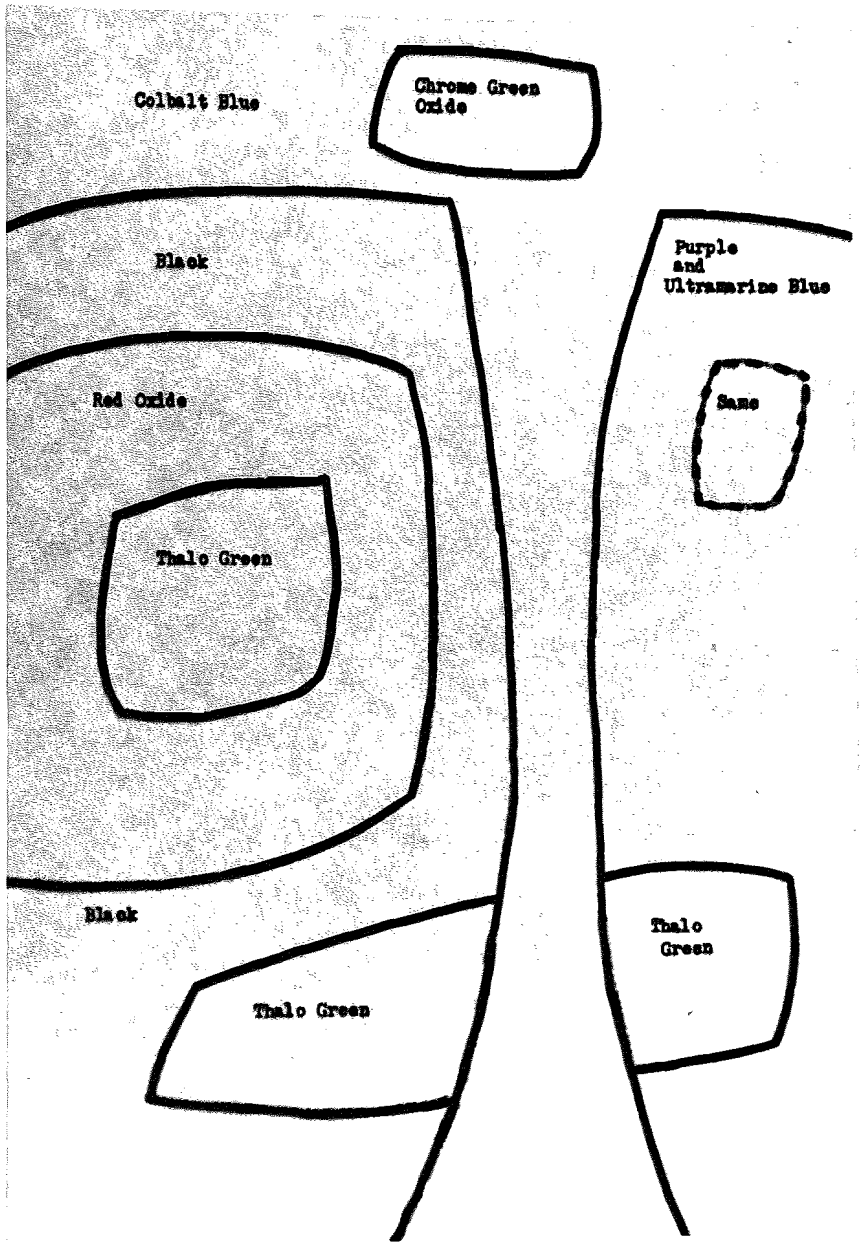

Figure 17. Outline diagram for, "Black on Black, No. III."

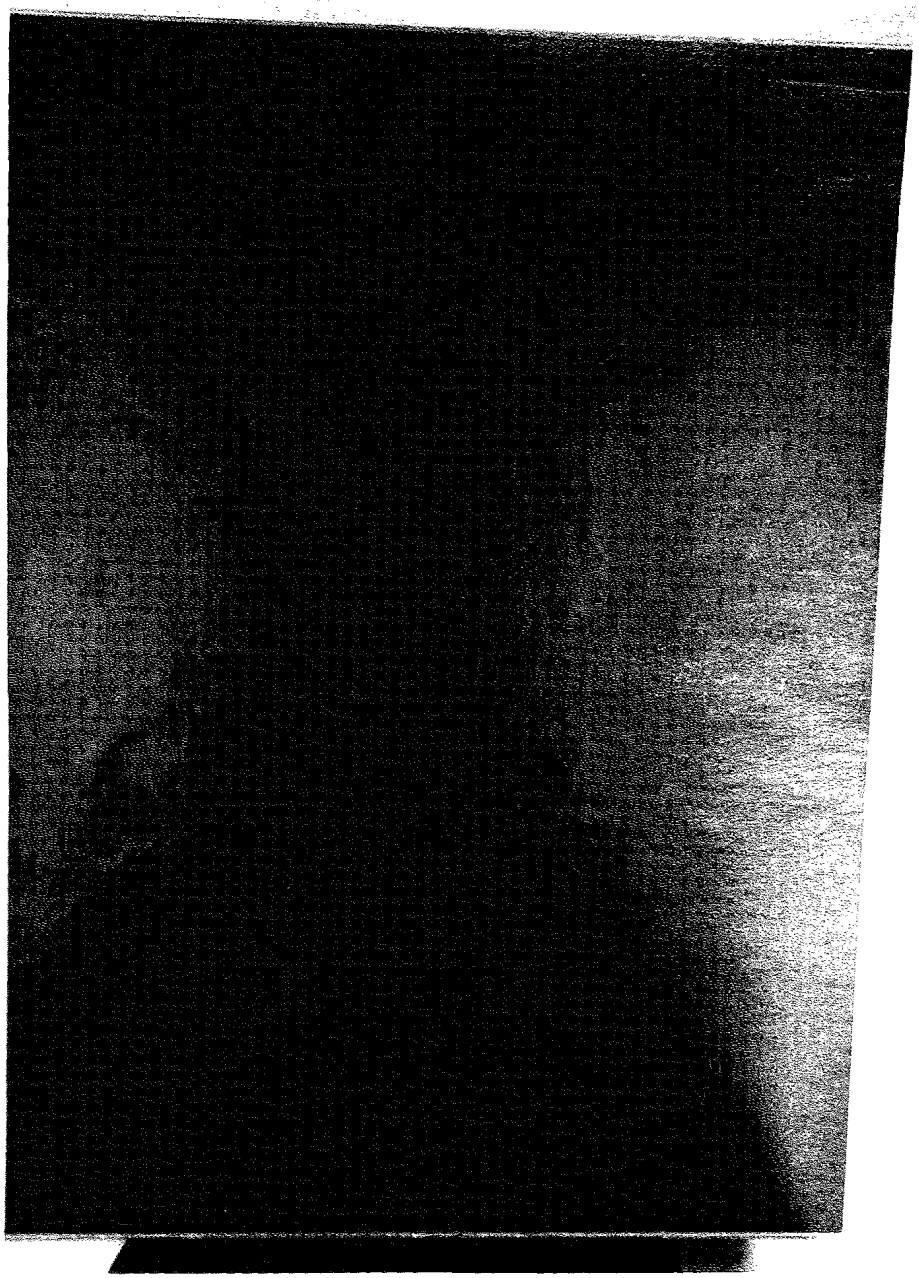

Figure 18. Acrylic painting, "Black on Black, No. III," by the writer.

the formula was about ½ chosen color to ½ Mars Black. With this painting one could almost say certain blacks have a "pastel" quality in color.

As most of Reinhardt's "black" paintings were rarely dead black, so here also the black shapes have a flicker of color to them. At the same time the differentiation of color and value was not meant to distract from the over-all "blackness" of the composition. The outline diagram of this painting shows the tones of color used in each area. (Figure 13)

Painting No. II, (Figure 16) has the same format as the Painting No. I. Here the variety is within the area of color.

The differentiation of color and value is much more subdued in this composition. This work leans more toward the "ultimate black" concept. Still, there is enough variation of tonal blacks to give interesting spatial illusion, form, and background relationships.

The color flickering from the blacks seems more grayish than of a "pastel" tonality. The function of the blacks here is to emphasize the values of light or dark rather than the color. See the outline diagram for color tones used. (Figure 15)

With Painting No. III, (Figure 18) the differentiation of color and value was to be as minimal as possible.

This is the key function of black here. Only traces of chosen color were used with Mars Black. The closer and darker values were meant to create the "ultimate" in black painting. Nevertheless, the painting is not "colorless," and the work is deceiving at first glance. More careful examination reveals the format as being slightly different than the two previous black paintings. The outline diagram, (Figure 17), shows the color tones used with the black.

The painting, "White on White, 1968," and the painting, "Black on Black, No. III," are the extreme opposites. Yet, regardless of the differentiation of value, the final goal of each was the same. Reinhardt claimed no symbolic significance in the cross form within his black paintings even though he used them continually. Maybe Reinhardt did not wish to acknowledge symbolic intents or actually had no conscious symbolic awareness. Neither did this painter have any such awareness in executing his black paintings. The visual experience of the surface as the "subject" is sufficient to this painter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The three paintings represented in this thesis, by the selected artists, reveal interesting usage of the art elements in relation to black and white.

Only the quality of line, used as an edge, was considered in this study. The fluctuating, though comparatively straight lines in Malevich's, "White on White, ca 1918," or the more irregular lines in Kline's, "Slate Cross," are a contrast to the hard edge lines of Ad Reinhardt's, "Ultimate Painting, ca 1960." This painter felt the latter type of edge was less distracting to the desired emphasis on color relationships.

The style of the shapes or forms, as well as the texture and value used by each artist, was well utilized, to the best possible advantage, to enhance the function of black and white.

Historical usage of black and white symbolism, as well as the application of symbolism by the artists, was both interesting and revealing but not essential to an appreciation of visual concepts.

A non-objective approach removed the problems involved in conventional subject representation. Thus the problem could focus on black and white color function.

This painter felt, in executing his studio paintings, that planes of related color, were more revealing when texture was de-emphasized.

The more massive shapes or forms, rather than small, detailed ones, enforced the visual concept of the color relationships. The value and tonal quality of chosen colors in the two extreme paintings, as well as the "in between" paintings, were more or less arbitrary. Yet decisions were dictated, to a degree, by the preceding study of the selected artists. This was all incorporated in the experimentation.

In the final analysis, the value of the study developed a new understanding of these selected artists and their approach to the use of black and white. This broadened the painter's outlook and became a tool to further the exploration of black and white as color.

New concepts of creative possibilities for black and white compositions are revealed. The necessity of the interdependence of the color shapes and their size, the need for contrasting oppositions (subtle or extreme), the requirement for balanced order and equilibrium, and the realization of new texture possibilities, all work for a more exciting and enjoyable composition. Thus black and white, as color, function in a new and dynamic existence.

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